

Cultivation of Ethics

*"If Madrashas of those drunks
Became the educational institutes
of teaching philosophy of
Epicures, Plato and Aristotle;*

*If Abode and Mazars of Peer and Drabesh
Is turned into research institutes,*

*If men instead of following blind faith of religion
should have cultivated ethics,*

*If the abode of worships were turned into
Centers of learning of all academic activities,*

*If instead of studying religion, men
would have devoted to develop mathematics - algebra,*

*If logic of science would have occupied the place of
Sufism, faith and superstition,*

*Religion that divides human beings
Would have replaced by humanism,*

*Then world would have turned into haven,
the world on other side then would have extinguished,
the world would then become full of
Love-affection-freedom-joy,*

And there is no doubt about it."

- Omar Khaiyam

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Rationalist Society

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Forever and ever....

It is pity, but it can't help being the case, that because children have to be suckers for traditional information, they are likely to believe anything grown-ups tell them, whether true or false, right or wrong. Lots of what the grown-ups tell them is true and based on evidence, or at least sensible. But if some of it is false, silly or even wicked, there is nothing to stop children believing that too. Now, when the children grow up, what do they do? Well, of course, they tell it to the next generation of children. So, once something gets itself strongly believed even if it is completely untrue and there never was any reason to believe it in first place it can go on forever and ever.

- Richard Dawkins



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DRAFT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY BILL

Maharashtra Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Practices and Customs Act 2004

(In a recently held Assembly session at Nagpur, Maharashtra Assembly has passed the Bill "Maharashtra Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Practices and Customs Act 2005" which was a modified version of earlier Draft Bill 2004. The article describes the details of the earlier version of the Bill and objections raised on some of the schedules and their clarification. Prior to table the Bill in Assembly session, meeting was held in Mumbai of all concerned. It was decided unanimously to include 12 schedules at the first instance. This would enable smooth sailing of the Bill to be enacted as law. We congratulate all the members of Legislative Assembly for passing the Bill. - Editor)

It is necessary to create awareness in our society to provide a healthy and safe social environment with a view to protect the poor and ignorant people against the evil and sinister practices and customs



thriving on blind faith, beliefs and ignorance. The blind faith and beliefs are propagated in the name of God or some so called divine or super natural or magical powers or evil spirits. The God's men, quacks and conmen exploit and harm mentally, physically and financially the poor and ignorant people in the Society thereby destroying the very social fabric of the Society.

The exploitation of poor and ignorant people as well as some educated elite has reached alarming proportion at the hands of so called God's men, quacks and conmen. It has, therefore become absolutely necessary for the Government to take appropriate, urgent and stringent, social and legal measures to effectively curtail the spread and evil

STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION

Now, Ignorant have hope

ANS has welcomed the decision of the Maharashtra State Assembly to adopt the anti-superstition Bill at the Nagpur session of the House. However it feels that many provisions in the Bill have been toned down to mitigate the opposition.

"We welcome the decision. But the provisions, which would have provided the Bill with teeth, have been toned down" says Dr Narendra Dabholkar. He however added, "The passing of this Bill shows the progressive nature of this Government."

ANS has been lobbying for the past 15 years for a legislation, which would help in cracking down on the elements perpetrating superstition. "We have been dealing with cheating cases by elements who don the garb of irrational beliefs to fool the ignorant. But, due to loopholes in current legislation, they always used to bypass the laws" says Deepak Girme, in-charge of Pune unit.

According to him, the Indian Penal Code laws and the Magic Remedies & Objectionable Advertisement Act of 1954 failed to nail the culprits. Moreover, Girme feels that when the Bill becomes an Act it would deter the miscreants, who use superstitious beliefs to further their own cause.

ANS will launch a statewide campaign to sensitize people about the Bill. "People ought to know that if they are cheated, there would be a legislation to provide them justice" Dabholkar says. Plans are also afoot to make school children aware of the Bill and enlighten them about superstitious beliefs. "We will also train police personnel about the Bill" Dabholkar added.

Courtesy: Indian Express

effects of the harmful practices of black magic and to save the poor and ignorant from falling prey to the sinister designs of the black magicians, quacks and conmen. Their false claims of possessing magical or miraculous remedies or powers should be exposed and their antisocial and harmful activities seriously threatening and damaging the very social fiber should be stopped as they distract the common people from the authentic and scientific medical remedies and cures.

Many people believe that making a law would not eradicate blind faith and the consequent exploitation of the poor and ignorant. What we need is awakening, education and economic well being of the downtrodden. Quite true and many social organizations are engaged in creating awareness among the poor people and helping them to help themselves. But it is a time consuming process and gives respite to the unscrupulous conmen to carry out their nefarious activities in the mean while. To stop their mal-practices and to bring them to book is essential to hasten the process of education and creating awareness. A law against such practices is utterly necessary to give teeth to the organizations that are fighting superstition.

Salient Features of the Bill

The Bill seeks to prohibit practice, promotion and propagation of Black Magic. A comprehensive definition of the term "practice of Black Magic" contains the evil practices, customs, etc., and also the unauthorized and illegal practice of medicine or healing or curing by quacks, conmen and the so-called godmen. Such practice is being made an offence under this Act and to serve as a deterrent it is proposed to provide for a stringent penalty and punishment, making such practice a cognizable and non-bailable offence.

It provides that Vigilance Officers be appointed, who shall endeavor to detect and prevent such offences and collect evidence for effective prosecution of the persons committing this offence.

It provides for recognition of social organizations committed to social cause. It stipulates that they shall endeavor to achieve eradication of Black Magic and evil practices and customs in the society and endeavor to effectively implement the provisions of the law.

It empowers the Court to convict and punish a person for commission of an offence under the provisions of this law.

Schedule

The actions that are considered as offence against this law are listed here as follows. Objections to some of the provisions of this law appear now and then in the news papers. Those objections along with clarification and comments on them follow the particular clauses.

1. Under the pretext of expelling the ghost assaulting by tying a person with rope or chain, beating by stick or whip, to make the person to drink root, fixing him with rope or by hair, causing pain by way of touching heated object to organs of a person

2. Forcing a person to perform sexual act in the open

3. Practicing aghori acts by chanting mantras, putting urine or to create an impression on existence of things beyond or contrary to proven scientific rules and to deceive cheat or terrorize any person by propagation and circulation of such practice

4. Arms, tongue, cheek or any part of the body pricking pointed objects in the body, whipping one self, cutting oneself with a sharp instrument on one's forehead and any other part of the body to inflict self injury or committing any act in the public places either causes known (?) or cause pain to normal human being in the name of religious customs

Objection: A few Bhagats use needles as in acupuncture to cure diseases. Whipping oneself is an age old Potaraj custom. People traditionally slightly injure themselves and put a red mark with their blood on the forehead of the idol. All these actions in the light of this clause are criminal. No doubt, they are superstitions; but is it a crime severe enough to invite 7 years of imprisonment? These superstitions do not pose any danger to life. They should be tackled with education, creating awareness and awakening. Making use of law will antagonize the common man who will rebel against the government and the police and render the enforcement of the law impossible.

Clarification: Potaraj does not really beat himself but he pretends to do that. Hundreds of our workers demonstrate this in mass meetings. There is no question of their being punished under this law. But when the same hook is used for piercing hundreds of devotees who come to fulfill their vows or to draw blood from their foreheads with one and the same razor is not even remotely related to worshiping a deity. It involves the danger of spreading infections and especially AIDS. When perpetrators of these negligent practices are tried in the court, the judges do use their sense of proportion and the apprehension of their being sentenced to 7 years imprisonment is uncalled for.

5. Create or propagate or invite spirit of God or Goddess through any person as a medium

Objection: In thousands of temples in India, tens of thousands of men and women are made to get possessed on the day of Ashtami. Muslims are - as a common custom - made to be possessed by Sawari. Undoubtedly they are superstitions. But is it possible for the government of Maharashtra to put them all in jail?

Clarification: Being possessed is a hypnotic state. It is glorified by tradition as being besotted by a deity. Catharsis or releasing pent up emotions by huffing and puffing, gasping and wheezing and such other hype and believing it to be the work of a deity or Devi is not considered a crime. According to the law, a superstition becomes a crime when it leads to pain, injury, harm or deceit. But when someone claiming that he/she is possessed pretends to reveal the names of individuals who are practicing Black Magic (actually accusing someone for vengeance) and spreading unrest or ordering people to insert their hands in boiling oil to prove their innocence or giving deceitful answers to questions related to people's lives are punishable crime according to the 5th clause. And there cannot be two opinions about it.

6. Doing any inhuman act for search of precious things, bounty, water resource in the form of Karani, Bhanamati and making or trying to make human sacrifice by making 'Jaran-Maran or Buvabaaji, Devi Mata, etc.

7. In the name of Jaran-Maran, Karani or witchcraft (Chetuk) assaulting any person, parading him naked, excommunicating or declaring any person as outcaste or to expel a person from society or put a ban on his activities declaring such a person as possessed by evil spirit or incarnation of evil spirit

8. Causing disturbance in society in general or creating panic or cause limitation by way of chanting Mantras or Tantrik action in the name of exorcising a ghost or to free a person from the influence of ghost or evil spirit

Objection: How can mere chanting of Mantras become a crime? Chanting of Mantras while exorcising a ghost does cause panic in the surroundings. One who thinks he is possessed quite often gets relief from the malady when Mantras are chanted. Visiting a psychiatrist is beyond the means of such person. In such circumstances is it wise to rob him of the only remedy available and affordable?

Clarification: The panic caused while chanting Mantras as stated in the objection itself is a divine terrorism. This godly dread is much more serious than the familiar terrorism and is beyond any law at present. This clause, therefore, is utterly necessary. A bigger error in the objection is the contention that forms the latter part of this objection. The psychological illness of a person can be severe or mild. Changed expression, muttering to oneself, experiencing illusions, neglecting personal hygiene, incoherent behavior, etc., are symptoms of severe mental illness called psychosis. To treat such a person by Mantras for exorcising the ghost that has supposedly possessed him is an inexcusable mistake. The Mantrik and his Chanting Mantras can never cure such persons. It only delays proper treatment at the cost of the

patient's health. Mild psychological illness cause temporary changes in the behavior that many take to be possession by a ghost. These patients do get temporary relief, at times, by accepting the suggestions of the Mantrik. But this treatment for mild malady is also wrong. The social and family stress and strain that cause this ailment should be addressed; positive suggestions should be given along with the minimum medication that is necessary in such cases. This simple treatment does not need an inaccessible and expensive psychiatric facility. A general practitioner or a well-informed and knowledgeable community social worker can do the job. Treatment by the Mantrik amounts to mis-handling the sick mind of the patient and is certainly a crime. (In fact a law prohibiting unauthorized medical practice is already in place and action can be taken against such practitioners.)

9. By declaring that 'Devi' or a spirit has influenced one's body, create disturbance by shouting and thereby spreading threat and disturbing the general peace, declaring the names of such person miserable or difficult, to provide unscientific cure to psychosomatic conditions such as filling angara and amulets to the people

Objection: It is a serious mistake to proclaim use of Angara and Amulates criminal. Psychological treatment is important in treating all types of psychosomatic diseases. In this kind of illnesses the traditional remedies like angara (sacred ash like powder), Ganda (a thick cord to be tied round the wrist), Dora (a string round the neck), Tait (Amulate) prove very effective because of faith and age old practice. These are superstitions and they can only be overcome by awakening the ignorant people. Will using the weapon of law against them produce the expected results? It will be sensible and practical if their use is labeled criminal when they are used for curing diseases like diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, etc., where stopping or not giving authentic medical aid can cost the patient's life. The traditional ways despite being superstitious help in reducing anxiety and tension and prove complementary to modern medicine. Even the World Health Organization has recognized treatments as Alternative Medicines that include some superstitious methods too.

Clarification: Regarding psychosomatic conditions the main problem is who is to decide whether the illness is psychosomatic or not. If it is a headache is it due to mental agony like anxiety or due to a brain tumor or hypertension or cold or due to need for glasses? A practitioner of alternative medicine just cannot reach an accurate diagnosis. Confusing a somatic ailment with a psychosomatic one causes much avoidable trouble. Examples of mal-treatment because of such wrong diagnosis are aplenty. All that one can say is that once a correct

diagnosis is made, a practitioner of traditional medicine on obtaining minimum training in treating such illness be allowed to treat psychosomatic diseases to reduce the patient's tension and anxiety.

10. To spread threat amongst the people by way of invoking mantra or putting up a false show to make a person free from poisonous infection creating an impression that there is ghostly or divine wrath causing physical injuries and stopping any person from taking medical treatment and instead diverting them to practice aghori acts or deeds

11. To create an impression that insanity has been caused to a person due to influence of ghost or divine power and to conduct Mantra-Tantra to cure him by way of sacrifice of hen or goat or any other animal.

12. In case of dog bite knowingly committing the act of giving unscientific treatment of Mantra-Tantra, ganda-dora and herbs, etc., to a person infected with rabies instead of modern medical treatment or preventing him from accepting the same

13. Assuring any women to perform Gopal Santan ritual in the fourth month of her pregnancy for birth of male child.

Objection: It is necessary and will be more useful to convince women and also men that it is impossible to change the sex of a fetus in the fourth month of the pregnancy. Banning Gopal Santan ritual by law will not stop it.

Clarification: Fully knowing that once a woman conceives, it is not possible to change the sex of the fetus, performing Gopal Santan ritual is a grave deceit that in addition supports the most unnatural desire for only sons. All this is criminal.

14. Cheating people in the false hope of providing freedom from madness offering treatment to patients of serious or terminal illnesses by offering stones with power of mantras, finger rings, bangle, jog stick, thread, Tali, Ganda-dora, etc., with such false hope

Objection: Treating terminal patients with charmed stones and cheating them with false hopes becomes a crime under this law. The common man turns to this method as a last resort only when the doctors admit that they are helpless. The relatives of the patient at such point in time are emotionally much too upset and the police will simply not be able to interfere. Where is the need for a law in such cases?

Clarification: It is distressing that the relatives of a patient suffering from terminal illness turn to unscientific superstitious methods out of frustration. All of us should and do sympathize with them. But the unpardonable confusion here is that the helplessness of these people is mistaken to be a license for cheating. Advertising any godly treatment is a criminal act according to the law in existence. The new law is a step

forward and declares the treatment too a crime. Recently a number of cancer patients whose treatment was discontinued by medical practitioners approached Aslam Baba who claimed to remove their cancerous growth merely with his fingers. They spent a lot of money, time and energy in traveling, staying in a place without facilities, and the treatment itself; and all this in vain. One can sympathize with those who use a Deity's angara for psychological support but Aslam Baba must be brought to books. For that we need a stringent law. In practice the police and the judges will undoubtedly use discretion and that is enough. The law is meant for curbing the activities of those who exploit the blind faith of ignorant and gullible poor. It does not interfere with the sentiments of the patient's relatives.

15. Haunting a person with an influence of ghost by practicing witchcraft which cannot be proved with the help of modern science

16. Treating any disease with the help of mantra-tantra without authorized or recognized medical degree under the law for the time being in force.

Objection: The meaning of the Sanskrit word Mantra is also Praising the Lord or Prayer. In the Marathi Dictionary Tantra means the acts that are carried out during prayers. Almost all Mantras in the final analysis are prayers. To ban mantra-tantra treatment given by a person who does not possess a recognized medical degree in the case of psychic and psychosomatic illness and give all the rights of treating these patients to medical professionals is erroneous, unscientific and inhuman.

Clarification: Whatever the meaning of the Sanskrit word or the meaning given in the Marathi Dictionary, the act of treating diseases by mantra-tantra without any knowledge of the cause of or remedy for them is criminal as it prevents the patients from getting proper treatment at the cost of their health. The law is not made for the purpose of giving all rights to medical practitioners but tries to protect patients from the machinations of the Mantrik who certainly are no angles. Their purpose is not philanthropic but self-aggrandizement.

17. Threatening a person with death or causing physical pains or causing financial or psychological harm by Mantra-tantra (witchcraft) Black magic or by practicing Aghori treatment

18. Trying to make believe burning of things, vanishing of things appearance of cross marks on the body, etc., as effect of Bhanamati and claiming treatment for the same

Objection: All the above things will be declared criminal acts by law. We have so far solved hundreds of Bhanamati cases. The police on the other hand have struggled with all their means for as long as 15 days at a

stretch without solving a single case. Out of all the cases that we handled not a single one remains unsolved. It is a human being who is behind all these tricks only to grab attention wittingly or unwittingly but certainly not with the intention of causing any trouble or damage to others. All that he or she needs is sympathy. The Mantrik or the Black Magician very much like the police does not understand how it happens. He is not to be blamed for his ignorance at least in this case. To condemn an ignorant and innocent person is surely inhuman and immoral.

Clarification: The Mantrik surely is ignorant of how or why Bhanamati is caused. But all the same he does not fail to extract a lot of money for treating what he does not know. No one will agree that condemning a Mantrik is inhuman and immoral. Wasting people's time, energy, money and depriving them of their ability of reasoning for a treatment about which you know nothing is certainly a crime.

19. Operating stomach by fingers, diagnosing disease by placing stone, Pharshi (tiles) on the head, making use of improper and harmful methods to diagnose and treat diseases and illness



20. Claiming to perform miracle by burying oneself in the ground

21. To appear in the state of complete nakedness in the public place and misbehaving with women by treating oneself as Awalia baba or baba with divine power

Objection: This has already been declared a crime under the Indian Penal Code. The Digambar Jain

Sadhus, the Naga Sadhus and some other Sadhus remain naked. Is it possible to book them under this law? In India and especially in the Vidarbha region, mentally imbalanced men and women are traditionally deemed Awalia Babas and Satimas respectively. These diseased minds are unaware of what is happening in their surroundings and have no intention of cheating anybody. The law should provide not for punishing these mad people but for punishing those unscrupulous men/women who exploit the madness of these people for their own benefit.

Clarification: The clause regarding "Wrapping nakedness in respectable expressions such as Awalia or Videhi and misbehaving

with women' has no relevance with any Hindu traditions, Naga Sadhus, or Digambar Jain Acharyas. Yet there is no objection to deleting this clause so as to appease the contenders.

22. Providing local (country) treatment or practicing Mantra-tantra rituals as a proven treatment to alleviate the poisonous infection of a snake bite

23. Claim to have divine remedies for abortion, contraception, enhancement of physical satisfaction in the sexual act for men and women, increasing their sexual power, menstruation problems, conceiving, etc.

Objection: Psychological processes are of great importance in the matters of sexual satisfaction, sexual vigor and problems of menstruation. Meditation, prayers and other traditional mental practices can bring about a lot of improvement in these matters. With regard to these facts clause seems unscientific.

Clarification: The claim to have divine remedies for any thing is criminal because such a claim does not stand any scrutiny. He law does not ban meditation, prayer, etc.

24. In the disguise of offering motherhood by performing some divine act or magical remedy keeping sexual relations with women who are unable to conceive, deflowering them, keeping illicit relations with them

Objection: This clause may be made applicable only if the woman concerned herself complains of being deceived.

Clarification: It is unlikely that any woman will come forward and complain about the perpetrator of this crime for obvious reasons and this will leave the godman, Baba, Guru or Mantrik to go about his business merely and molest many more innocent young girls or middle aged women.

25. Under disguise of offering God's blessings, cheating people by way of accepting money or any other belongings by unlawful means

26. In the name of religion, Holy Scriptures, God and goddesses, display of false extraordinary powers, indulgence in free sexual relations, adopting unethical and corrupt means for cheating and duping people

Objection: A person, in this case should be brought to books only if he poses to be a reincarnation of some deity and only if the victim complains of being deceived. Our country is inundated with sexual problems especially in case of women. In such circumstances if both the partners, with mutual consent enter into any sexual relationship under some religious guise, why should the government or any organization for eradication of superstition should interfere? Is it proper or necessary? The social organizations, in fact, should have a liberal and

humane outlook towards it.

Clarification: does this sound like the methods of Bhagawan Rajaneesh?

27. Compelling women to enter into prostitution under blind faith

The last and the most important allegation is that this law is meant to condemn the superstitions of the ignorant villagers and not those educated urban elite who intentionally cheat and swindle others. It is not possible to ban superstition by law and it should not be banned. What we need is a comprehensive law to prosecute a person if he is accused of causing monetary loss by another person.

The demand for the provision of criminal proceeding against those who exploit others in the name of faith and religion on receiving a complaint from the victim is fully justified. ANS agrees with it completely. However the charge that this law is made keeping in view the poor ignorant villagers and condemns them for availing of whatever little support they get from the sources in their surroundings, letting the educated urban elite free to indulge in fads like Feng Shui, is simply without a shred of truth in it and therefore unacceptable. A survey of those who fall prey to superstition conducted recently in the metropolis proves that this law is unbiased and unprejudiced. The law is a first step in the right direction. It has taken 14 long years to take this first step. Let us now unite to progress further with all our might put together.

- Suman Oak



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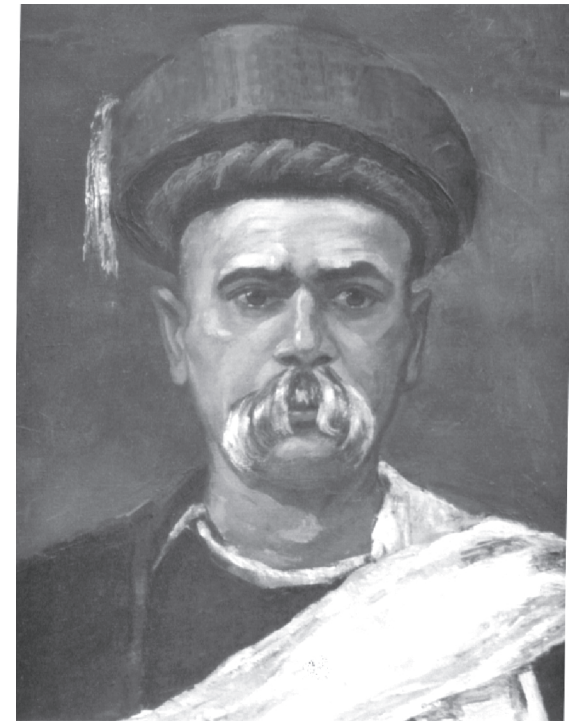
SAINT OF RATIONALISM: Gopal Ganesh Agarkar

**"What ought to be spoken will be spoken, and
what is possible will be done."**

“ इष्ट असेल ते बोलणार आणि साध्य असेल ते करणार ”

How does one form an estimate of Agarkar's work and legacy? It will be inappropriate to do it in clichés, however sonorous they might turn out. His was a life of ceaseless toil with a singular aim, beautiful in its simple nobility which he once candidly conveyed to his mother: “.... Enough if I can earn minimum so that I can use all my time for the good of others.” And he steadfastly lived up to the goals he set for himself. The short-lived life of this clear thinking, sober and dedicated reformer is to be measured, in the words of his close associate, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, “not by its length but by its breadth”.

Agarkar undoubtedly occupies a special place among the nineteenth century reformers. What singles him out is that morality, individual and social, does not depend on religion and that morality of common people will be improved sooner by giving them



some insight into modern science and philosophy than by merely appealing to their religious feelings.

Another striking feature of his reformism was his permanent concern for freedom. In every facet of his life and work, there shone this concern for freedom, personal and social, as the most desired consummation, and a passionate urge that all individuals irrespective of their colour, caste, religion and sex should get an opportunity and realize their best selves. For him individual was a sacred entity.

Dominant concerns in his writings were social, ethical and scientific attitude, in their thorough application to all varied aspects of human life. He relentlessly argued that an age of skepticism does more for a country, what nothing else can do. Unless doubt begins, progress is impossible. He was exactly of the same opinion, which has now so eloquently expressed by Thomas Kuhn in his celebrated book, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, to the effect that unless you change your paradigms, alter your framework of inquiry, and raise new set of questions, there cannot be any real breakthrough in knowledge.

Agarkar, more than any other contemporary reformer, placed the problem of reform in its historical setting, influenced by the concept of progress that has been developed by the Western thinker Condorcet, and through him by J.S. Mill, he saw mankind moving through stages in its historical development, each stage related to the knowledge at that time, each stage preparing the next. Therefore, he said that the acquisition of fresh knowledge is an indispensable condition for every step in social progress but a spirit of doubt and love of inquiry are necessary conditions of such acquisitions.

Such a scientific conception of progress would not permit him to accept the contention of Justice Ranade's favourite Bishop Butler that "Conscience was put into man by God to point to him his duty and make him to do it, and that the dictates of Conscience are the voice of God". In countering this argument Agarkar wrote, "Whoever reads Leaky's *History of European Morals* cannot but be impressed with the truth that the elements of conscience of each generation differ from those of preceding generation as well as succeeding generation." The variation, he said, is governed by definite rule, namely those elements which have an infelicitic tendency grow obsolete in mind while new elements are added which are felicitic under special circumstances. Agarkar was keenly aware of the relativity of the significance of ideas and institutions to the given historical situation.

Agarkar had both didactic and genetic conception of history. He viewed history basically as change, and said that social good presupposes a changing, living society. To exist is to change, evolve,

mature, and progress. He knew that a true reformer purifies and enlarges human heritage. Whatsoever worth preserving from old texts, he said, should be preserved by all means. But he exhorted his countrymen, especially orthodox section of the society, not to regard everything old as sacrosanct and any mention of change is sacrilege.

Agarkar consciously fought against obscurantism and also against every form of injustice. He bared the plight of the dispossessed as much as Jotirao Phule. He never hesitated to call a spade a spade but always did it through reasoned argument and in a chaste language. G.P. Pradhan has accurately observed that Agarkar was doggedly polemical but never complacently dogmatic and his occasional sarcasm never sardonic but tempered with humour. He, more than any other nineteenth century reformer, introduced the Marathi intellectual elite to progressive Western thought that has gone into the making of the modern world.

Agarkar excelled as a teacher, and impressed on the minds of his pupils, what they could do for their caste-ridden enslaved country. And as G.K. Gokhale has stated the first great lesson Agarkar set to his countrymen was that "it was possible to be useful even in humble position" and "it was possible to be patriotic without much great noise". He was second to none in his love for the country and denouncing the evils of the foreign rule, but unlike orthodox status quoists, he would not reject progressive ideas that came in the wake of the British rule. It would not be exaggeration to say that Agarkar anticipated, if not contributed to the most modern-day progressive movements. He surely inspired Dhondo Keshav Karve's movement for female education. Raghunath Dhondo Karve, the pioneer of birth control and family planning movement claimed himself to be the only true disciple of Agarkar. The secularists as well as present day activists of "Andhshraddha Nirmoolan Chalaval" (Movement for Eradication of Blind Faith) owe much to the seeds of rationalism sown by him. All progressive writers, from Hari Narayan Apte to Yashavant Dinkar Phadke and Arun Tikekar recognize their debt to the noble rationalist rebel of the nineteenth century Maharashtra and speaks a lot of legacy.

The legacy of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar is the legacy of the open-minded, rational inquirer who searches for a reasonable solution to all disputed questions and does not make up his mind until he considered all the evidence. Agarkar had chiefly learnt from J.S. Mill whom he adored and to whom he paid glowing tribute.

The mission and message of his short but eventful life is clearly brought out in the following memorable word he wrote on the fateful night when he thought his life was coming to an end:

Dearest friends

I now put down lifelong convictions as briefly as I can and implore you to try your best to carry them out during your life time, if you be my friend:

Education (of all kinds) is the salvation of humanity. Perfect loyalty honourable not obsequious to the British Government who have done so much in this important respect. That alone the easiest road to the establishment of an autonomy at some distant date in this country...

J.S Mill! I shall be very happy to come to life again, to sit at your feet and to work in the Deccan Education Society for the work of which not the most unpleasant events even produced the slight aversion in me; if of course, it be possible for you to be again my most admired, beloved and revered Guru (English words don't satisfy me here), and for me to be your humblest and observant pupil.

Friends, try your best to maintain unity, peace and mutual affection and even regard amongst yourselves, but in doing this never lose sight of the object for which the Society has been established. I must stop the legs, the head, the eyes are getting very hot. Be generous to forget every offence given well meant or ill meant, properly or improperly, either to you or to my countrymen through the columns of Sudhakar, since all that I regard sacred and holy, I tell you that I sincerely loved the cause of human progress and generally believed that the manner in which I spoke and wrote was the properest for me in the "grand struggle of existence".

May you be long-lived! May you be happy and pray you be most serviceable to your country and humanity... Adieu! June 1893 I do not remember the date.

William Everton Gladstone called Mill "Saint of Rationalism". The same could be said, with equal truth, of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar. And indeed, the celebrated Marathi novelist V.S. Khandekar meant the same thing when he called him -

देव न मानणारा देवमाणूस

Dr Aravind Ganachari

(From his Book: Gopal Ganesh Agarkar)

A CONFLICT BETWEEN Science and God

It isn't very often that a mere visit to an exhibition counts as a political act, but that's certainly how it feels these days as you mount the steps of the American Museum of Natural History, overlooking New York's central park. Admittedly, there wasn't a protester in sight when I visited this week, and staff has not yet faced picket lines or hate mail. This is, after all, New York City, not Salt Lake City. But organizers of the museum's terrific new exhibition in the life and work of Charles Darwin acknowledge that theirs is an explicit gesture of defiance towards an anti-scientific Christian fundamentalism that is again running fast and deep in contemporary America.

New York's Darwin exhibition is model of its kind. It takes you comprehensively and fascinatingly through the great scientist's life story. But it is the exhibition's deeper message that makes most of modern America. It asserts without shame, fear in compromise that Darwin's theory of evolution is quite simply true. In other modern democracies this is an uncontroversial statement. In modern America it is an act not without bravery. That is why, for instance, corporate sponsors have run a mile from \$2 million event that elsewhere would have them queuing up for the privilege.

Reflect on this. Only one out of four Americans believes life on earth today has evolved through natural selection. Three-quarters of Americans, in other words, still do not accept what Darwin established 150 years ago. Just under half of all Americans believe that the natural world was created in the present form by God in six days as described in Genesis. They believe, incredibly, that the earth is only a few thousand years old.

But these people are not content to disagree with Darwin and the scientists. They are up for a fresh fight with them. The notion that the scientists had won the arrangement in America after the reaction to the Scopes trial 80 years ago, when a Tennessee teacher was convicted of breaching a state ban on the teaching of evolution, has faced many reality checks in recent years. School boards and education authorities in several parts of America have mounted a series of anti-evolutionary

challenges. These have often come under the guise of “intelligent design” the conceit that the complexity by the intercession of a supreme being on a par with evolutionary theory. This claim, advanced on spurious grounds of fairness to different theories, is utterly without any scientific validity, yet a Pennsylvania court will rule on the matter early in the New Year.

In the 15 years since it surfaced as the strategy of choice for a new generation of biblical literalists, intelligent design has had an incredibility soft ride into many parts of American public life. When he was running for president in 1999, George Bush gave the idea his blessing in an interview, saying that he favoured the teaching of “different schools of thought” and adding “I mean, after all religion has been around a lot longer than Darwinism ... I believe God did create the world. And I think we're finding out more and more as to how it actually happened.” Mr. Bush has avoided the issue since then, but the anti-evolution campaign has plenty of momentum of its own now.

Since 9/11 you often hear the argument that the literal western world must study and learn more about Islamic order to better comprehend the fundamentalist Muslim mind. May be so. But you do not often hear people advocating similar inquisitiveness about the fundamentalist Christian mind. Perhaps that too ought to change, especially if we want to understand an America in which religious feeling is growing, not shrinking, and in which outriders are promising more audacious intellectually and politically by the day.

I challenge visitors to go into a good American bookshop and not be amazed at the scale and subject matter of the religious books on display. Particularly fascinating is the religious fiction section. Believe me, we're not talking C.S. Lewis here. Check out the biggest shelf presence of the lot, the left Behind series of novels by “prophesy scholar” Tim LaHaye with Jerry B Jenkins 60 millions volumes so far and you will get an inkling of the intensity of the apocalyptic “holy living in an unholy age” crusade against science in modern America.

One of the best hits in the former British diplomat Christopher Meyer's memoirs comes when he relates how, as British ambassador to the U.S., he always made a point of stressing that America is a profoundly foreign country not a larger and more powerful version of Britain. Of course, as with all generalizations about the U.S., the reality is more complex and subtle. As recent presidential elections have shown, America is a divided country not a homogeneous one. But Mr. Meyer's point is right even so.

We live in a world dominated by the United States. The U.S. claims

and asserts military and economic and moral primacy in the world. And yet, not least in the estimation of many of its people, the U.S. is not like rest of the world. In their eyes, it is a special place whose specialness is part, and even proof of a divine purpose. It is but a small step from there to say that divine claims should take precedence over science and rhetoric over reason.

Is America a nation in the vanguard of the modern world? Or is it also a nation in revolt against the modern world? One thing is clear: America will not resolve this dilemma until it is more honest and, courageous with itself about science and religion than many Americans today. Against the onrush of the madness, the Darwin exhibition in New York attempts to draw a line. Perhaps we should see it as a part of wider fight-back against the recent hijacking of America that can also be seen in the renewed energy of the U.S. domestic argument about Iraq. Either way, it surely deserves a global cheer.

Martin Kettle

Courtesy: The Hindu

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NARENDRA MAHARAJ AND HIS MACE

Narendra Maharaj was traveling by air from Lucknow to Mumbai in the first week of December. He was not allowed to carry his mace with him when he boarded the flight. And this irked his followers who had come to receive him at the Mumbai airport.

And what followed was nothing but abandonment of rational thinking. These days no one is allowed to carry any personal belongings that may appear to cause harm for sake of security. Even a pair of harmless tweezers, blunt scissors are not allowed. The security has been tightened after the September 2001 attacks. Even other religions, such as Sikhs, are not allowed to carry their 'kirpans' and have to submit it to a flight attendant and collect it later.

So why should Narendra Maharaj be excused? His mace was taken away from him, during the flight. And according to his followers, that was a threat to the Hindu religion. What sort of an argument is this, for rioting and hooliganism? I am sure all rational minded Indians are appalled at the extent of unruly social behaviour in the name of religion.

- Anuradha Bhagwat



A NEW PROGRAMME FOR SOCIAL REFORM

Narendra Dabholkar is a person who has dedicated his life to the cause of eradication of superstitions and problems of blind faith. A talk with him gave a different meaning to the words 'passion' and 'mission'. The Dabholkar family belongs to Dabhol, a village near Vengurla in coastal Kokan region of Maharashtra. Eventually, the family moved to Satara and settled there. Narendra Dabholkar did his schooling and college in Satara. Later he obtained the MBBS degree from Shivaji University in 1970. In his youth, Dabholkar associated himself with the Socialist Youth Force, Baba Adhav and his 'Ek Gaav, Ek Paanavatha' (one village, one water source) movement. Along with his involvement in social causes, he practiced medicine for 12 years in Satara.

In 1982, Dr. Dabholkar bade farewell to medicine and freed himself from the hassles of the daily grind. Sitting in the 'Sadhana' office, Dabholkar gave the reasons for this bold decision. "I was not interested in business or making money. Actually at that time I was not sure about what I would do in life. I had a desire to bring some change. I was passionate about raising the esteem of a person in his own eyes. I wanted to contribute in the intellectual pursuit of the society as a whole."

Superstition Eradication Movement

While discussing on superstition eradication movement in India and his own foray into it, Dabholkar gave valuable insight.

"Prof. Abraham Koor, originally from India, who later settled in Sri Lanka is given the credit of being the founder of the anti-superstition movement in the Indian subcontinent. However, in India the credit goes to Dr. Premanand from Kerala."

Dr. Premanand visited Maharashtra in 1983. He traveled extensively and would perform 'miracles' himself and exposed the 'Buvabaji' (activities of the so-called god men). Dr. Premanand's activities left an indelible mark on Dabholkar and gave him the path and

inspiration for his social calling.

"Dr. Premanand's tour of Maharashtra paved the road for my work. After working on this idea in Maharashtra for some five years, the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS) was founded in 1989. The idea took shape and the organisation started growing with time."

ANS has spread all over Maharashtra today. It achieved all this with no help from the government or financial help from any other institution. ANS is a movement in the true sense of the word. The wholehearted support of the people is the only means of earning for the organization. A new organisation has been registered just to enable the donors to avail of the tax benefit that the government gives for donations to ANS. For the last 15 years, ANS has been publishing the 'Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Vartapatra', which helps in creating social awareness. Sale of audiocassettes of speeches, books, advertisements in the magazine's annual special issues etc. help fund the movement. All this proves that ANS has chartered its course with meticulous details, avoiding unnecessary expenditures and running activities on a tight budget. Individuals from varied fields and different regions volunteer to work for ANS, keeping time aside from their daily engagements. It is with the help from these volunteers that ANS can work without funding from institutions and operate independently, laying an example for other organisations to follow.

Movement for Social Awakening

ANS was founded to put an end to the malpractice of misleading gullible people using superstitious beliefs. Explaining the agenda of the movement Dabholkar said,

"... to eradicate superstitions, ANS has a three pronged agenda. The first is direct confrontation and protest, second is to introduce scientific outlook to change mindsets and third is to analyse religion critically. The implementation is done by demonstration by volunteers in different villages, conducting lectures, giving speeches, discussions and publications etc."

While talking about faith or belief a lot of questions are raised. A faith for someone could be a blind-faith for another. As the Indian constitution has left this open for interpretation, how does the organisation face such threats and whether the organisation has a right to interfere with an individual's right to his or her beliefs. What makes this movement against superstitions a social reform movement? Dabholkar's answer to these questions revealed the finer points of his character. "Let us take

your first question. I would like to clarify that our movement operates within the framework of the Constitution. ANS respects the right of every individual to practice whichever religion he wishes to. But this clause also has its limits, which are specified by the Constitution. Our movement has always respected these boundaries. In 1976 there was an amendment in the Constitution according to which, rational thinking, quest for new discoveries and developing a scientific outlook were included as duties of a citizen of the nation. Now you tell us, do we trespass on anyone's constitutional rights? This is a duty laid down by the constitution and we are following it."

"The protests against our movement come out of tangled relationships, which include the 'ministers, the soothsayers, fortune tellers, religious heads and institutions and most prominently, people who want to use religion for politics. They use religion as an easy tool to influence people. It is much easier to get elected on these issues rather than creating infrastructure and providing basic facilities to the public. This is the reason why religious festivals like Ganapati, Navaratri, Raamanavami, Hanuman Jayanti, Gokulashtami, Datta Jayanti etc have their 'mandals' (associations) which are becoming more powerful each day. Some of the festivals were never originally celebrated in Maharashtra the way it is being done now. We had never seen a 'rath yatra' (chariot procession) on Maha Shivaratri before, but it has started in the last few years. Ten years ago, Maharashtra was not so religious. How did this happen? Some people realised that if they were clothed in religious garments, it becomes easy to demand votes by propagating the so-called threat to Hinduism from other religions. Such organisations and their ideologies have no dearth of funds, which come from the black market. The people funding them crave for recognition. Many a times this money comes from corruption or money that cannot be declared or used in the white market. Hence they erect big mandals, praise the holy lord and convert their money to white!"

Continuing with the discussion, Dabholkar linked social service with progressiveness,

"Your next question was why this movement should be called a social reform movement? See, two things are absolutely essential for any sort of reform or progress, firstly an iron will and secondly financial support. Our movement emphasizes on both these factors. Social, religious myths, traditions, rituals and superstitions arising from these lay a burden on the finances the same way they burden your heart and mind. I feel if you add up all the money spent on the religious functions like marriages and 'navas'(wish fulfillment), they will be a major part of the economic activities of our nation. After the bombing of Hiroshima in

Japan, all its citizens came together, keeping aside their personal desires and celebrations, to save money for 20 years. The money collected from these savings helped in economic reforms after 1965 and today Japan is an economic giant.

Every year Maharashtra needs a loan of Rs.1000 crores to store and use the water of Krishna River whereas its people spend about Rs.1000 to 1200 crores every year on marriages and other such functions. Our movement wants to bring this to light and eliminate this paradox. You may then call it social service of a self-funded organisation or whatever else you may desire, that is a very personal perspective." He signed off in this way, linking ANS to a farsighted social flame.

S. G. Tapaswi

Courtesy: Ruchi : (Translated by Ranjit Mulay)

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PAUL KURTZ:

A RATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE AT U N

Rationalist International congratulates the Center for Inquiry (CFI), founded and chaired by Prof. Paul Kurtz, for being granted "special consultative status" as a non-governmental organization (NGO) under the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The CFI is now entitled to designate official representatives to UN headquarters in New York and UN offices in Geneva and Vienna. It can participate in conferences and briefings open to NGOs, and generally present the scientific, skeptical, and secular humanist perspective to the international community.

Professor Paul Kurtz, Honorary Associate of Rationalist International, commented: "In an age of clashing fundamentalisms and unprecedented missionary evangelism, the commitment to secular government and freedom of conscience should be heard. In the coming century of bio-genetic science, scientific inquiry offers great opportunities for humankind and should be encouraged, not censored. Scientific rationalism needs to be present in deliberations at the UN." The Center for Inquiry in Amherst, New York, is home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, founded in 1976, and the recently formed Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health. Research and educational projects focus on three broad areas: religion, ethics, and society; paranormal and fringe-science claims; and medicine and health.

IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

Superstition or Andhashraddha has unfortunately been a part of Indian society since times immemorial. These habits and way of life have been passed on from generation to generation; unfortunately some are made more rigid while others have been relatively relaxed. It is a dire commentary on superstitious beliefs and regressive behaviour that our country figures in the list of backward nations. The litany does not stop here - it has stifled the creativity of individuals and has led to lack of initiative on their part. If we were to prod deeper into the origins of superstitions we find that most of these superstitions probably came into existence with a good intention behind them. But over a period of time they have been misused, twisted misinterpreted and now have become extremely rigid. For instance some trees (say a banyan tree) have been considered holy and cutting them down is a sin. The idea underlying such thinking was to prevent reckless felling of trees.

Moving on to the present day scenario we find that things are pretty much the same if not worse. Let us get an insight into the day-to-day life of people governed by these superstitions, "Stop it at once Nikhil! Don't cut your nails at night", Ms. Iyer tells her ten-year-old son. "But why Mom?" asks Nikhil. 'It's an ill-omen Nikhil, it will invoke evil spirits' says Ms Iyer. Mrs Iyer is a 40-year-old qualified doctor and she still has this kind of a mindset. It's more shocking than surprising. It comes across as a rude shock that the 'educated' class is still very much in the grip of superstition. They are all hypocrites if they claim to be modern, rational or scientific in their thinking. They certainly may be qualified professionals but their mental befits the medieval age. Take the Joshi household for example - They have this belief that if any occasion falls on a Saturday. It is not to be celebrated! Why because it is considered inauspicious. So if your birthday fell on Saturday too bad, you can't celebrate. This custom has been followed by the Joshis for the past three generations!

Another very widespread notion is that women should not cook or even enter the kitchen, enter a temple, or go anywhere near a place of worship during their menstruation. This has got to be one of the most unreasonable beliefs. It is a natural biological process and there is no reason why that should bar women from temples or their own kitchens! The latest thing is to design homes as per Vaastu Shastra and Feng Shui. People spend lakhs of rupees to design their homes so that they are in accordance with the principles of Vaastu Shastra. Another thing in vogue is to keep Feng Shui items at home like the good luck Buddha or the bamboo bonsai for good fortune. Up to a certain limit all this is fine

but some people just go overboard. Another belief that tradesmen like a carpenter will not work during Amavasya (new moon). They say that it is inauspicious to work on Amavasya!! People still refuse to walk further on a road if a black cat has crossed their path. They wait for someone else to walk by first so that the ill omen does not harm them but the other person who walked first. This is such a waste of time. A person has to be an absolute fool to believe in this.

As the saying goes "it's all in the mind." Who are we to decide if one day is inauspicious and another is not!! Hard work never did anyone harm, if it did it was no work at all. We all need to rise above these petty beliefs and notions and adopt a truly scientific, rational outlook to life. This will benefit not only an individual but also the society and the nation as a whole.

- Ila Gokhale ■

COLLAPSE OF US ECONOMY BY AUGUST 2005

Of course, it will be Saturn again! Casting an evil spell over the USA, UK, India, Iran and Japan during July and August, the trouble maker planet will cause new and sensational catastrophes, predicts Lachman Das Madan, 82, well-known political astrologer in India. He sees another 9/11-type attack on the USA that will damage the country's major economic projects and cause the collapse of US economy by August 2005.

Madan and Saturn are not always to be believed. It was only last September that the octogenarian astrologer, who has been guiding the steps of top politicians including several Indian prime ministers, committed an embarrassing blunder by loudly predicting split and fall of the new Indian coalition government, caused by "Saturn in the ascent". Back in 1995, Sanal Edamaruku exposed Madan in a popular TV talk show, documenting some of his major flops. Soon followed the "Great Astrology Challenge" in the talk show Question Forum, during which Edamaruku put the astrologer's prediction skills to a fool-proof test. Madan failed miserably. But he never stopped making great claims.

A few days after the London bomb blasts, Madan claimed also that he has predicted the terror attacks in May. As a proof, he produces an issue of his self-published magazine Baba Ji, in which one can read in black and white that Saturn, changing his position on June 6, would cause "serious transport accidents in London within one month". As always, when Madan "proves" his timely forecast of a major world event with some backdated issue of his magazine, there is nobody who remembers to have seen this issue before.

Courtesy: Rationalist International

ACUPUNCTURE: TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

'Chinese medicine,' often called 'Oriental medicine' or 'Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM),' encompasses a vast array of folk medical practices based on mysticism. It holds that the body's vital energy (chi or qi) circulates through channels, called meridians that have branches connected to bodily organs and functions. Illness is attributed to imbalance or interruption of chi.. Ancient practices such as acupuncture and the use of various herbs are claimed to restore balance.

Traditional acupuncture, as now practiced, involves the insertion of stainless steel needles into various body areas. A low-frequency current may be applied to the needles to produce greater stimulation. Other procedures used separately or together with acupuncture include: moxibustion (burning of floss or herbs applied to the skin); injection of sterile water, procaine, morphine, vitamins, or homeopathic solutions through the inserted needles; applications of laser beams (laserpuncture); placement of needles in the external ear (auriculotherapy); and acupressure (use of manual pressure). Treatment is applied to "acupuncture points," which are said to be located throughout the body. Originally there were 365 such points, corresponding to the days of the year, but the number identified by proponents during the past 2,000 years has increased gradually to about 2,000. Some practitioners place needles at or near the site of disease, whereas others select points on the basis of symptoms. In traditional acupuncture, a combination of points is usually used.

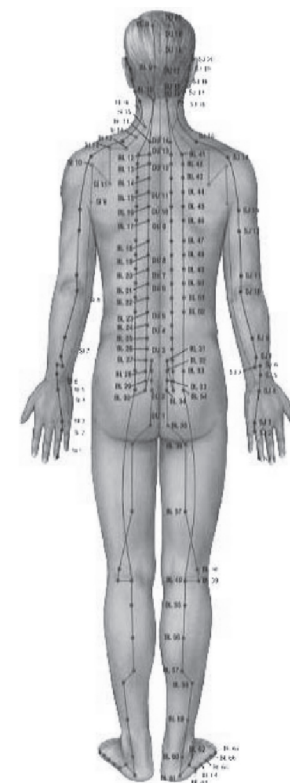
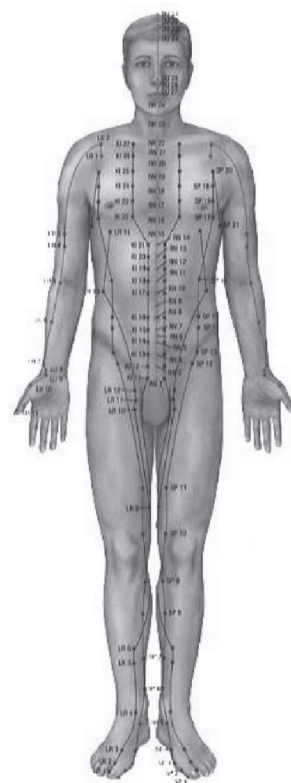
Most acupuncturists espouse the traditional Chinese view of health and disease and consider acupuncture, herbal medicine, and related practices to be valid approaches to the full gamut of disease. Others reject the traditional approach and merely claim that acupuncture offers a simple way to achieve pain relief. The diagnostic process used by TCM practitioners may include questioning (medical history, lifestyle), observations (skin, tongue, color), listening (breathing sounds), and pulse taking. Six pulse aspects said to correlate with body organs or functions are checked on each wrist to determine which meridians are "deficient" in chi. (Medical science recognizes only one pulse, corresponding to the heartbeat, which can be felt in the wrist, neck, feet, and various other places.) Some acupuncturists state that the electrical properties of the body may become imbalanced weeks or even months before symptoms occur.

These practitioners claim that acupuncture can be used to treat conditions when the patient just "doesn't feel right," even though no disease is apparent.

The conditions claimed to respond to acupuncture include chronic pain (neck and back pain, migraine headaches), acute injury-related pain (sprains, muscle and ligament tears), gastrointestinal problems (indigestion, ulcers, constipation, diarrhea), cardiovascular conditions (high and low blood pressure), genitourinary problems (menstrual irregularity, frigidity, impotence), muscle and nerve conditions (paralysis, deafness), and behavioral problems (overeating, drug dependence, smoking). However, the evidence supporting these claims consists mostly of practitioners' observations and poorly designed studies. A controlled study found that electro acupuncture of the ear was no more effective than placebo stimulation (light touching) against chronic pain. In 1990, three Dutch epidemiologists analyzed 51 controlled studies of acupuncture for chronic pain and concluded that "the quality of even the better studies proved to be mediocre. . . . The efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of chronic pain remains

doubtful." They also examined reports of acupuncture used to treat addictions to cigarettes, heroin, and alcohol, and concluded that claims that acupuncture is effective as a therapy for these conditions are not supported by sound clinical research.

Acupuncture anesthesia is not used for surgery in the Orient to the extent that its proponents suggest. In China, physicians screen out patients who appear to be unsuitable.



Acupuncture is not used for emergency surgery and often is accompanied by local anesthesia or narcotic medication.

How acupuncture may relieve pain is unclear. One theory suggests that pain impulses are blocked from reaching the spinal cord or brain at various "gates" to these areas. Another theory suggests that acupuncture stimulates the body to produce narcotic-like substances called endorphins, which reduce pain. Other theories suggest that the placebo effect, external suggestion (hypnosis), and cultural conditioning are important factors. Melzack and Wall note that pain relief produced by acupuncture can also be produced by many other types of sensory hyperstimulation, such as electricity and heat at acupuncture points and elsewhere in the body. They conclude "the effectiveness of all of these forms of stimulation indicates that acupuncture is not a magical procedure but only one of many ways to produce analgesia [pain relief] by an intense sensory input." In 1981, the American Medical Association Council on Scientific Affairs noted that pain relief does not occur consistently or reproducibly in most people and does not operate at all in some people.

Improperly performed acupuncture can cause fainting, local hematoma (due to bleeding from a punctured blood vessel), pneumothorax (punctured lung), convulsions, local infections, hepatitis B (from unsterile needles), bacterial endocarditis, contact dermatitis, and nerve damage. The herbs used by acupuncture practitioners are not regulated for safety, potency, or effectiveness. There is also risk that an acupuncturist whose approach to diagnosis is not based on scientific concepts will fail to diagnose a dangerous condition.

The National Council against Health Fraud has concluded:

Acupuncture is an unproven modality of treatment.

Its theory and practice are based on primitive and fanciful concepts of health and disease that bear no relationship to present scientific knowledge

Research during the past 20 years has not demonstrated that acupuncture is effective against any disease.

Perceived effects of acupuncture are probably due to a combination of expectation, suggestion, counter-irritation, conditioning, and other psychological mechanisms.

The use of acupuncture should be restricted to appropriate research settings,

Insurance companies should not be required by law to cover acupuncture treatment,

Licensure of lay acupuncturists should be phased out.

Consumers who wish to try acupuncture should discuss their situation with a knowledgeable physician who has no commercial interest.

Far more serious, although the consensus report touched on Chinese acupuncture theory, it failed to point out the danger and economic waste involved in going to practitioners who can't make appropriate diagnoses. Despite considerable efforts to understand the anatomy and physiology of the "acupuncture points," the definition and characterization of these points remains controversial. Even more elusive is the scientific basis of some of the key traditional Eastern medical concepts such as the circulation of Qi, the meridian system, and the five phase theory, which are difficult to reconcile with contemporary biomedical information but continue to play an important role in the evaluation of patients and the formulation of treatment in acupuncture. Simply stated, this means that if you go to a practitioner who practices traditional Chinese medicine, you are unlikely to be properly diagnosed. In 1998, following his lecture at a local college, an experienced TCM practitioner diagnosed me by taking my pulse and looking at my tongue. He stated that my pulse showed signs of "stress" and that my tongue indicated I was suffering from "congestion of the blood." A few minutes later, he examined a woman and told her that her pulse showed premature ventricular contractions (a disturbance of the heart's rhythm that could be harmless or significant, depending on whether the individual has underlying heart disease). He suggested that both of us undergo treatment with acupuncture and herbs -- which would have cost about \$90 per visit. I took the woman's pulse and found that it was completely normal. I believe that the majority of non-medical acupuncturists rely on improper diagnostic procedures.

A study published in 2001 illustrates the absurdity of TCM practices. A 40-year-old woman with chronic back pain who visited seven acupuncturists during a two-week period was diagnosed with "Qi stagnation" by 6 of them, "blood stagnation" by 5, "kidney Qi deficiency" by 2, "yin deficiency" by 1, and "liver Qi deficiency" by 1. The proposed treatments varied even more. Among the six who recorded their recommendations, the practitioners planned to use between 7 and 26 needles inserted into 4 to 16 specific "acupuncture points" in the back, leg, hand, and foot. All of the acupuncturists had been trained at a school of TCM. It would be fascinating to see what would happen if a healthy person was examined by multiple acupuncturists.

- Stephen Barrett, M.D.

ORIGIN OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

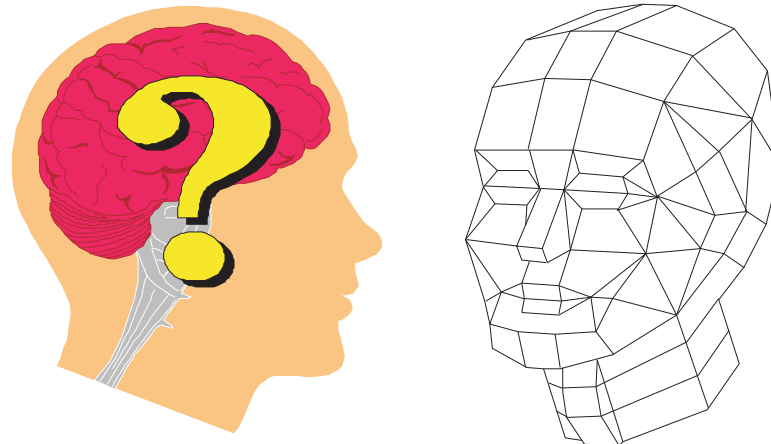
People with temporal lobe epilepsy are prone to religious hallucinations. Two decades ago, this finding led Michael Persinger, a neuro-psychologist at Laurentian University in Canada, to try stimulating people's temporal lobes artificially, to see if he could induce a religious state in them. He found that he could. By exposing volunteers' temporal lobes to a weak magnetic field, he was able to create in many of them the sensation of an ethereal presence in the room. Depending on a participant's religious inclination, that presence might be experienced as anything from Yahweh to a space alien. Although not all neuroscientists were persuaded by Dr Persinger's results, many researchers were indeed convinced that the neurological seat of religious experience had been found. The story was reported enthusiastically by the media, and, inevitably, charlatans latched on to it too. Electromagnetic headsets promising a personal meeting with God could be had for \$225 (shipping not included).

The precise interpretation of Dr Persinger's results has, of course, been controversial. But no one has questioned the results themselves. At least, not until now. But Pehr Granqvist, a psychologist at Uppsala University in Sweden, does now question them. In a paper about to be published in *Neuroscience Letters*, he and his colleagues suggest that Dr Persinger's original methodology was flawed.

Repeating the experiment without the alleged flaws, they could find no effect at all.

The flaw Dr Granqvist claims that Dr Persinger's original work suffered from was that it was not properly "double-blinded". In a double-blind experiment, neither the participant nor the individual conducting the trials knows who is truly being experimented on, and who is a "control", undergoing the illusion of being a subject in order to see if any observed effect is the result of the circumstances, rather than the substance, of the experiment. Nor, in the case of a psychological experiment, should either the participant or the conductor know the hypothesis being tested. In the case of Dr Persinger's work, Dr Granqvist claims that the individuals conducting the trials, who were often graduate students, knew what sort of results to expect, with the risk that that knowledge would be transmitted to experimental subjects by unconscious cues. Worse, he says that the participants were frequently given an inkling of what was happening by being asked to fill in questionnaires designed to test their suggestibility to paranormal experiences before the trials were conducted.

To ensure blindness in his experiments, Dr Granqvist used two



conductors in each trial. The first, who knew nothing of the purpose of the experiments, interacted with the participants. The second switched the magnetic fields on and off without informing either the first experimenter or the participant of what he was doing. The conclusion was that the presence or absence of the field had no relationship with any religious or otherwise mysterious experience reported by the participants. On the other hand, Dr Granqvist and his colleagues found that participants whom a questionnaire (filled in after the trials were over) had indicated were highly suggestible had paranormal experiences regardless of whether the field was on or off.

Dr Persinger disputes the Swedish team's findings. He says his protocol did meet the standards required for double-blindness even though some conductors knew the general area he was working in. He also says that suggestibility was not an issue, but that Dr Granqvist failed to cite the papers, which showed this. "If you co-vary for suggestibility, you still get the sensed presence effect very clearly," he says. "All of those articles weren't mentioned in the Swedish researchers' report even though they must have been aware of them." Dr Persinger is also convinced that Dr Granqvist and his colleagues failed to generate a "biologically effective signal" in their subjects because of a failure to use the equipment properly. "They didn't check to see if their fields were working," he says. "We always do. In every experiment, somebody verifies the field."

All this suggests that a third party should conduct yet another series of experiments. The origins of religious experience are one of the most mysterious phenomena in brain science. It would be nice to get a straight answer.

- Courtesy: Economist

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THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build

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Is this assumption correct?

It is usual to all those who feel moved by the deplorable conditions of the untouchables unburden themselves by uttering the cry 'We must do something for the untouchables'. One seldom hears any of the person interested in the problems saying 'Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu'. It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the untouchables. If there is to be a mission, it must be to the untouchables and if the untouchables can be cured, the untouchability will vanish. Nothing requires to be done to the Touchable. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him. Is this assumption correct? Whether correct or not, Hindus like to cling to it. The assumption has the supreme merit of satisfying themselves that they are not responsible for the problem of Untouchables.

Dr. B R Ambedakar



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NEED FOR ANS “VACCINATION” TO YOUTH

Vaccination to the Infected

All the while I wonder about why over 15 years of unrelenting struggle against Andhashraddha, by agencies like ANS, this epidemic still continues to thrive? I also wonder why educational institutions, administration, police, law etc do not cooperate whole-heartedly with ANS? Why it took so many years to pass the bill against Buvabaji? While trying to find the answers to the above, I feel that probably, approximately 90% of adult population is steeped into Andhashraddha, and miracles. This was evident while millions thronged to pour milk on the Ganesh idol presuming that the idol drinks the milk. Satya Sai Baba's sway over millions of Indians is also a stark evidence of belief system prevailing among us. If we assume that the efforts put by ANS like organization is equivalent to vaccination, this infection of blind faith can be uprooted in due course of time. At present the adults already infected with all kinds of belief systems, in turn mould the minds of their young with continuous barrage of irrational rituals, faith and strong belief in miracles. A very tiny fraction of our adult population escapes being infected with Andhashraddha, because of their rational parents and/or teachers. Probably over 90 % of our youth emerge as adults without any counter “vaccination” against superstition given by ANS or other rationalist agencies.

It is well nigh impossible to eradicate this “infection” in adults and they carry it for the next 40-45 years. No ANS vaccine is effective in adults. In fact it causes strong reaction and resentment against criticism of traditional faith and rituals and provokes them to block ANS vaccination to their children. The propaganda efforts among adult population, therefore, should be at very low key.

At the present level of vaccination of youth, probably we have a steady inflow of 90% infected and 10% vaccinated fresh youth annually; may be 20-25 lakhs out of total adult population of 400 – 500 lakhs. Even if, by an effective increase in vaccination doses, the inflow percentage may change marginally; say from 90:10 to 80:20. Even then it will take many more years to bring radical, appreciable and noticeable change.

No epidemic can be controlled, leave alone eradication of superstitions, except through massive, effective and continuous vaccination. At the present time if we are realistic ANS and other like-minded agencies are neither using enough vaccine nor giving adequately frequent doses to the majority of our youth in their formative years. Living as they do in a totally polluted environment continuously, an occasional sprinkling of ANS holy water cannot generate the results we are hoping for.

Efforts Required

It would seem that the period of fifteen years and the resources built up till now in terms of activists and educative material have proved not adequate enough to change the status-quo. Perhaps this explains the apparent lack of success to ANS campaign against Andhashraddha.

To sum up:

ANS has achieved some success against Buvabaji;

ANS has been largely ineffective in influencing the adult mass and weaning them away from Andhashraddha; and

With the recent advent of Vivek Vahini and Vidnyan Bodh Vahini the focus on Prabodhan amongst youth will be intensified. But unless this educative effort covers a large majority of all youth under 18 effectively enough to counter the blind belief environment in their homes and schools and colleges the results will be unsatisfactory.

In this regard, I have a few suggestions:

- Continue the intensive efforts on the anti Buvabaji campaign
- Shift the focus from educating our “infected” adults to continuous prabodhan to youth under 18. For this, all literary and persuasive skills at ANS disposal to be diverted for

preparation of materials in the form of pamphlets, booklets, posters, audio and/or video CDs, etc. to suit the tastes of majority levels of youth from 8 to 18 years of age. I regret to mention that at present ANS does not have a large number of activists/teachers who can effectively deliver the lectures. A question and answer mode in Socratic style could be more effective containing real life stories. We should explore all IT tools and information communication devices to be more effective and to reach a large number of youth.

- Pursue the relevant Government Departments to assist ANS in their efforts to reach schools and colleges. We should see that the Departments should not become stumbling blocks in our efforts.

Magnitude of *Prabodhan* Efforts

Our adults are mostly impervious to ANS educative effort, which means that 4-5 crores adults believe strongly in blind faith and miracles and a very tiny percentage adopts rationalistic life style. If this ratio of believers to non-believers is 90:10 and remains the same the rationalization of the society is not feasible. Our only hope is that against 13-14 lakhs who die every year and the new batch of above 18 youth join the adult population who are sufficiently rational, then only there will be some change in the ratio. This may take a very long time.

To accelerate this process of rationalization of whole society we must concentrate our efforts on the fresh batch of youth to expose them to progressive views during their formative years i.e. from 8 – 18 years period. A ten years span of school and college going period should be used to inculcate the rational ideologies to curtail the blind belief, miracles, fatalism etc. Since each annual batch is 25 – 30 lakhs of youth who join the adult population the *prabodhan* efforts have to cover at least 2 crore-school going and adolescent children! This is a daunting task and well beyond presently available sources of any single organization like ANS. However the efforts can be stepped up gradually by adopting following steps:

- Increase the resources as rapidly as possible;
- Identify and concentrate on the most cost-effective areas. Due to rapid urbanization a very large population is concentrating in very small areas in cities and townships. Here students are also concentrated in large numbers and can be handled with minimum efforts and less cost by a handful of mentors. Even here also priority should be given to school going girls.
- Using a small dedicated team of activists, experts and consultants develop standardized publicity materials, economical and affordable communication equipments, transportation facilities, maintenance and support teams, and modus operandi for monitoring;
- Social auditing structure to evaluate the results achieved by various campaigns; e.g. in terms of rational students against superstitious students
- Estimation and justification of costs, time and efforts for the tasks undertaken and lessons learnt
- List out the long term goals to be achieved: Number of students of 7-8 or 16-17 years age group to be trained at least 3-4 times in a year. It may be worth considering 2 or 3 levels of educative materials to suit the age group and their maturity level.

Plan to acquire Resources

- A few volunteers out of existing activists should be designated as mentors. Mentors need not be good orators. They should have interpersonal relation and communication skills. The present educational materials provided to the speakers, barring a few, are not very effective.

- The educational materials can be either audio or video, but preferably video which can be projected through TV (multiple) screens or projectors. The reading material should be affordable and easily accessible. The format of the booklets and pamphlets should be in the question answer format rather than continuous paragraphs.
- Transport needs will be low in the dense urban areas in comparison with remote rural areas. These needs to be met through local sponsorship of well wishers.
- Allot priority to the schools and colleges while undertaking the probodhan tasks
- Brief the concerned school authorities about the intention of the task undertaken which mainly stresses upon rationalism and scientific attitude and not meant to attack God and religion.
- Persuade the education department to introduce the text material on rationalism and scientific attitude and cite the examples. In fact the text book material should include chapters on environment, water conservation, family planning, tree plantation, educating the girls etc.
- Persuade other like-minded institutions and organizations to join the campaign with a parallel programs even under their own banner. In fact a federation of like-minded organizations at local and state level should be constituted to take up various issues faced by society. This will enable to concentrate the efforts and avoid duplicating unnecessary efforts.

The above proposals, if implemented, will really bring change in the society for which ANS is trying hard for last 15 years.

Vasant Divekar

CHALLENGES WHILE MEASURING SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE

Development of scientific attitude is considered as an important objective of science learning all over the world. Many teaching techniques are evolved and suggested to develop scientific attitude. Some, out of them, are the outcome of elaborate efforts of researchers. The challenge remains with the measurement of effects of these techniques. In other words it is a challenge of measurement of learning of scientific attitude, which is discussed at length in this write up. During the course of my work in the area of scientific attitude for the last 25 years, I have come across these challenges and tried to face them. This paper is aimed at making teacher educators, teachers, research students and also NGOs in the field aware of these challenges. Following are some of the major challenges in measurement of scientific attitude

- Conceptualizing
- Domain decision
- Content validity
- Selection of right type of measuring instrument
- Objectivity
- Teachers training

The challenge of conceptualizing scientific attitude comprises of many complex factors.

- Belief on cause and effect relationship.
- Suspend the judgment till enough data is gathered.
- Emphasis on empirical evidence.
- Open mindedness.
- Accuracy in thought and action.
- Intellectual honesty.

- Objectivity.
- Criticality.
- Unbiased decision making ability.
- Ability to identify difference between hypothesis and facts.
- Habit of reviewing the data.
- To keep away oneself from blind beliefs.
- Curiosity.
- Ability to think logically.
- Faith in development.
- Faith in problem solving.
- Ability to recognize self limitations.
- Interest in newness.

Apart from above sub-factors of scientific attitude, scientific temper and scientific outlook are the concepts having a very close relationship with scientific attitude.

Under such circumstances, it is mandatory for test constructor –

- To understand and define each factor of the above list by dictionary meaning and also by some examples.
- To identify some similarities and differences in these factors.
- To classify them into sub-categories.
- To limit to some of these factors for the purpose of measurement so as to make the measuring instrument usable.
- To make operational definition of scientific attitude.

In the process of limiting to few factors and converting those into operational definitions, the totality of the concept and as a consequence the totality of measuring instrument is likely to be threatened. Apart from this, the selected factors (which will define scientific attitude) may not be easily convertible in the test items in spite of best efforts of defining them operationally. The challenge of domain decision Psychological variables are generally categorized into three domains. These are cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The domain of the variable which is to be measured needs to be fixed for two reasons:

- It helps in deciding right type of measuring instrument.
- It also helps in writing appropriate test items.

Assessment and Measurement

The test constructor faces the challenge in making this decision as attitude is generally categorized as a factor of the affective domain. But if we look at the factors given above, which comprise scientific attitude, we realize that only one single domain is not sufficient to encompass all the factors. Categorization of each factor under some single domain will also be artificial. Still if tried, factors like objectivity, criticality, unbiased decision making ability, ability to identify difference between hypothesis and facts will have to be categorized under cognitive domain. Whereas factors like intellectual honesty, habit of reviewing the data, faith in development, faith in problem solving will occupy space in affective domain. A factor like accuracy in action will go under the psychomotor domain.

Content Validity

A decision of content validity is the next challenge for the test constructor. The development of scientific attitude starts from learning of science. But later on, it is expected to exhibit its presence in all walks of life. So the content is too vast for the test or it can be said that it will not be limited to the specific content. To select the sample content for construction of scientific attitude test items from general experiences is not an easy task.

Another issue in this is how one can guarantee transfer of scientific attitude from one area to another, i.e. the person having scientific attitude in health related issues may not have it in issues related to religion.

Selection of Right Type of Measuring Instrument

Witnessing concrete evidence of scientific attitude through objective measuring instrument is extremely difficult. Attitude is defined as a stable predisposition to respond. This stability is understood either

- As a consistency across modes of responding to an attitude object. or
- As a consistency in individual responses across time.

Such an analysis suggests the inadequacy of the usual procedure of measuring attitude at a single time by attitude scales and calling these responses attitude. Scientific attitude cannot involve only a measure of final product. The process also becomes important with the use of word scientific, as this word refers to the way attitude is developed. If an attitude scale is constructed and the test item asks to give favorable or unfavorable response to the statements then this response alone may not provide enough information about scientific attitude because the process involved in reaching to this response cannot be revealed. The test items for measuring scientific attitude need to measure cognitive, psychomotor and affective aspects. So varied types of test items need to be constructed. A routine type of attitude scale will not serve the purpose. Multiple types of tests and test items need to be thought.

Objectivity

Whichever is the tool chosen for measurement of scientific attitude, it will carry along with it numerous problems of objective measurement because of the complexity of the phenomenon. It is observed that experts in the field hardly come to an unanimous opinion about scientific attitude as a procedure and also as a product. It affects adversely on inter-examiners' objectivity.

Teacher Training

Teachers hardly get any training of construction of scientific attitude measurement test at pre-service or in service training programs. This training is essential as the standardized tools are rarely available and even if they are available they may not serve local purposes. Teachers training institutes need to think in this direction. It is seen that this major objective of science teaching is neglected in evaluation, measurement process and so as a consequence of this it is neglected in teaching too.

Leena Deshpande

SPECIAL ISSUE of ANS VARTAPATRA

Every year, ANS brings out a special issue, the famous 'Diwali Anka' as known in Marathi. It now a yearly activity in Maharashtra – hundreds of Diwali special magazine issues are published; the Marathi reading audience reads their contents with enthusiasm and gusto. These magazine special issues are dedicated exclusively to short stories, political issues, fashion, cookery, diet, health, humor, you name it and there is a special issue on it. ANS's Special issue is no exception. The issue is an extension of ANS monthly news magazine or 'vartapatra'. This year's ANS Special Issue was no exception. More than 350 page issue is filled with articles of authors who endorse ANS's views and is a part of the ANS movement of eradicating our society of the ill effects of superstitions, blind faith and use of religion for manipulating innocent people of their monies.

ANS volunteers have done a wonderful job of getting sponsors and collecting advertisements from various persons. From the number of sponsors and their generosity indicate that there are many who support ANS activities and may be agreeing with ANS philosophy. The ANS 'varta patra' is financially sound, thanks are due to the sponsors and advertisers who donations have to be gratefully acknowledged and gracefully accepted.

There are about 14 – 15 articles on topics such as: "Does communication media spread and increase superstitious beliefs?", "Is ANS against the Brahmanical order?", some educative articles regarding history and mechanics of cycle, or on if alternative medicine is another way of cheating people. The issue is interspersed with lighter articles, some stories, a few poems, and an interview with ANS supporter and famous Marathi stage and film actor Nilu Phule, some funny cartoons taking a dig at everything and everybody, one Mahashweta Devi's translated story about a witch, one satire even imagines what would happen if a buwas starts his own news paper! The job of collecting articles, collating everything and editing has been done by Prof. Arde, whose efforts have made this issue a thoroughly enjoyable edition to read.

Let us now take a peek at what is within the two covers of the ANS Diwali special issue.

There are more than a dozen articles worth mentioning.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the satire by Mr. Heramb Kulkarni, where he imagines what would happen if a buwa starts his own new paper – what would it contain is the question he asks and sees what reader's correspondence would be! The news paper is named as Pa(ram) Pu(jya) Times and its editor is one Pa .Pu. Paramahmsaji, who calls himself a scientist and has a title 'Vidnaneesh'. The news paper is filled with humorously imaginary articles on what the editorial will hold, what sort of ANS bashing news it will contain, what are the reader's demands from Pa .Pu Times. The article starts hilariously on how the boom in information technology is helping the buwas and babas to sell their own propaganda on brochures using high tech prints. Worth a read.

The next article to mention is on how science is used to manipulate political decisions in the US. Since these days, unfortunately, everyone follows the 'big apple', now turned the 'big brother', the article is must read. The article written by Dr. Pradeep Patil is entitled 'Use of un-established scientific results for political manipulations in the US'. The US science and political policies are emulated by everyone, including Indian government. The article, very interestingly notes how some scientific claims are made without a thorough study or even a counter opinions, and millions of dollars worth of governmental funding , decisions and laws are being made based on these results. The author, through various examples has shown how any research that may affect religious beliefs have been twisted or stamped out. It will not be too far fetched to say that the same scenario is being repeated in the corridors of Indian political powers and scientific labs too.

And tell me which of us has not ridden a cycle and enjoyed the moments when balance and control is achieved? TB Khilare's essay on cycle is the case in point. He has elaborately researched and written a very well written article. It is said that if one understands the detailed Physics and engineering aspects of a cycle, s/he will be able to appreciate many fundamental scientific principles. The author has written elaborately on the rudimentary cycle, the bone-shaker to the current rage called kangaroo cycle.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar has penned a good reply to ANS critics, who accuse the movement of being anti-Brahmanical. In the article entitled, "Is ANS against the Brahmanical order?", Dr. Dabholkar has painstakingly explained what the ANS movement is about. Since religion is preached by 'high-caste' or erudite and learned members of the society, a movement such as ANS, that opposes false or irrational religious practices seems to be against them. In the Hindu religion, this translates into, being anti-Brahmanical. When ANS volunteers protest against a baba or buwa exploiting religion for exploitation of the innocent, they have never ever tried to know the 'caste' of the baba or the buwa. In the article Dr. Dabholkar has explained why ANS works to remove superstitious beliefs within the Hindu religion, and not in any other religion. He

says that since the problem is so deep rooted in our society, although ANS does raise a red flag and lodges complaints when any injustice is seen under the name of any religion, the number of such protests is obviously large for Hindu religion as the backbone of our volunteers come from areas where this is practiced. In future, he hopes the same can be replicated for people of other faiths and their rational inquisitive minds.

The ANS Special issue is always a joy to read, for its forthright, insightful articles, devoid of gloss and glamour you may find in other Marathi 'Diwali Issues'.

Anuradha Bhagwat

ALL PERVADING SUPERSTITION

Our country is steeped in superstition. We imbibe too many dos and don'ts since our childhood, almost all of them irrational and we are not even aware of it. We get up in the morning thinking of what day it is. If it happens to be a Saturday, we are expected not to start any new, good project for it will certainly prove a failure; if it is a Sunday women should not wash their hair as this act will lead to their brother's death; Tuesday is a day when new garments if worn for the first time catch fire because Tuesday (Mangalwar) is named after the Planet Mars that is a fiery planet and so on and so forth. For doing any thing we have to find out an auspicious moment and wait for it. For every little thing we are ready to surrender to God and accept His Will. As if all this is not enough we need Babas, Gurus. Buvas, Matajis, Devijis to intervene between us and the Almighty as far as Hindus are concerned. The other religionists too have their own intermediaries of this type to tell them what they should or shouldn't do. Pujaris, Priests, Maulavis and such other parasites are ever ready to help us through this arduous journey of life. We are so enamored of these godmen and their supernatural powers as well as their sweet soothing tongue that we gladly loose our ability to think and judge and question. This is about you and me, the common people.

Men in Power

But what about those who are in power, those who are responsible for shaping and cultivating our youth, our younger generations, the future of our nation? Our erstwhile Rashtrapati visited all the live deities that never fail their devotees to take a vow that he would visit them again on being elected President of India and religiously visited them again to fulfill his vows; of course with all the entourage of a Rashtrapati. Our ministers attend the birthday celebrations of many Babas and Buvas who claim to possess supernatural powers, that as some people say is very useful for money laundering and such other essential activities! One can quote innumerable examples of these great and powerful peoples' superstitious behaviors. Now about those who are shaping the pillars of our society's future.

Our Universities

Our universities, thankfully not all of them, have introduced a new subject-Astrology- mind you, not Astronomy, at the post graduate level. Attempts were made to introduce a novel subject, viz., Paurohitya in the University, the grand objective being the spread of our ancient Vedic culture and traditions and of course the ancient rituals all over the world. Vedic Mathematics, Vastushastra are in waiting to acquire a place in the annals of university education. Other obscure subjects like Reki, Transcendental meditation, Art of living and a number of Yogic therapies are gaining importance to day. It is not possible to deal with each of these fads separately but let us take the example of the ubiquitous Vastushastra.

Vastushastra

As the very name implies it is a science of building. As per the claims of the Vastushastris, their fantastic remedial changes in buildings, small and big, guarantee these Vastushastra buffs all health, wealth and happiness. Many eminent scientists and technocrats, industrialists and businessmen, psychiatrists and surgeons, engineers and even architects themselves fall pray to this dubious science. They make many impractical and at times dangerous structural changes in their office buildings, industrial edifices and workshops, hotels and dwellings and what not, expecting that these changes will make them happy ever after. Those who are able to taste success, obviously because of their acumen, expertise and hard work, talk loudly about the efficacy of the ancient science. Those who don't, keep quiet because it's not the science of Vastu that is to be blamed but the imperfect or half hearted following of it is what brought them misery. Quite a few buildings, it is said, are dangerously damaged because of the changes made according to the requirements of Vastushastra; leave alone the unnecessary expenses and inconveniences caused because of the changes.

Our Litterateurs

This whole lot of rich and powerful does not include our literary luminaries. They are not behind any of these eminent people in acquiescing with superstitious and irrational practices in the name of tradition. One has only to recollect the way the president of the Sahitya Sammelan defended the sacrifice of a buffalo for the success of the Sammelan without any untoward happenings. Can we then blame the ignorant, superstitious poor people who sacrifice lakhs of goats for appeasing their deities during the Jatras. I must mention here that in the recent Mandhar Devi Jatra goat sacrifice was banned, thanks to Maharashtra Government that finally woke up after the ghastly incident of the previous year when too many lives were lost.

Miracles

We have entered the 21st century with a lot of pomp and show. We have successfully sent satellites in space and improved our communication facilities tremendously due to TV and innumerable channels of entertainment and news, weather forecasting, mobile telephones and what not. We have indigenously developed our own missiles and even nuclear weapons making us independent as far as the defense of our country is concerned. We have constructed big highways and small roads reaching many small towns and villages. We use tractors and fertilizers and hybrid seeds in our agriculture. We have most talented doctors and engineers, Technocrats and management experts, economists and entrepreneurs in our country. In the field of ET, great countries like USA are alarmed at our progress. The list can grow ad infinitum. But with all this advancement we also believe in all sorts of miracles. We believe that the Baba can obtain things from thin air by just waving his hands. He is able to bless his rich and powerful devotees gold chains, diamond rings and expensive Swiss watches. We believe that there are Christian missionaries endowed with supernatural powers to make a lame person walk, to make the deaf and dumb to hear and talk and to make a blind man see clearly. We still believe that persons with supernatural powers can operate and remove cancerous growths from a person's body solely with their blessed fingers without any instruments or anesthesia. That we believe in such things and encourage their perpetrators even though we are capable of much scientific and technological advancement is the greatest miracle! I believe this is the reason why India is still a backward country. Instead of looking forward we still look into our 'glorious past' for support and sanction for any action. What are the reasons for this state of affairs?

Bill on Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Practices

Now let us turn to the bill 'The Maharashtra Eradication of Black Magic and Evil Practices and Customs Act 2005' that was recently passed in the legislative assembly banning harmful superstitious practices. The bill seeks to prohibit practice, promotion and propagation of Black

Magic. A comprehensive definition of the term 'practice of Black Magic' contains the evil practices, customs, etc., and also the unauthorized and illegal practice of medicine or healing or curing by quacks, conmen and the so called godmen. Such practice is being made an offence under this act and to serve as a deterrent it is proposed to provide for a stringent penalty and punishment, making such a practice a cognizable and non-bailable offence.

The Bill also provides for the appointment of vigilance officers to detect and prevent such offences and collect evidence against the offenders. This will help to prosecute the offenders effectively. It provides for recognition of Social Organizations that are committed to social cause. They are expected to help achieve eradication of these evil practices and implementation of the provisions of law.

It empowers the court to convict and punish a person for committing an offence under this law. Many people believe that making a law cannot eradicate blind faith and the exploitation of the poor and ignorant. What we need is awakening, education and economic well being of the people. No doubt, we need all this and many social organizations are creating awareness among the poor people and helping them to help themselves. But, you will surely agree with me that this is a long drawn process and gives respite to the unscrupulous conmen till people eventually become aware. Till then the conmen merrily go on with their nefarious activities. A law to stop these mal-practices and to bring the culprits to book will certainly accelerate the process of educating the people and creating awareness among them. It will also give teeth to organizations that are fighting superstition.

Dr Narendra Dabholkar

TEN-PERCENT MYTH

Someone has taken most of your brain away and you probably didn't even know it. Well, not taken your brain away, exactly, but decided that you don't use it. It's the old myth heard time and again about how people use only ten percent of their brains. While for the people who repeat that myth, it's probably true, the rest of us happily use all of our brains.

Myth and the Media

That tired Ten-Percent claim pops up all the time. In 1998, national magazine ads for U.S. Satellite Broadcasting showed a drawing of a brain. Under it was the caption, "You only use 11 percent of its potential." Well, they're a little closer than the ten-percent figure, but still off by about 89 percent. In July 1998, ABC television ran promotional spots for *The Secret Lives of Men*, one of their offerings for the fall season's lineup. The spot featured a full-screen blurb that read, "Men only use ten percent of their brains."

One reason this myth has endured is that it has been adopted by psychics and other paranormal pushers to explain psychic powers. On more than one occasion I've heard psychics tell their audiences, "We only use ten percent of our minds. If scientists don't know what we do with the other ninety percent, it must be used for psychic powers!" In *Reason To Believe: A Practical Guide to Psychic Phenomena*, author Michael Clark mentions a man named Craig Karges. Karges charges a lot of money for his "Intuitive Edge" program, designed to develop natural psychic abilities. Clark quotes Karges as saying: "We normally use only 10 to 20 percent of our minds. Think how different your life would be if you could utilize that other 80 to 90 percent known as the subconscious mind."

This was also the reason that Caroline Myss gave for her alleged intuitive powers on a segment of *Eye to Eye* with Bryant Gumbel, which aired in July of 1998. Myss, who has written books on unleashing "intuitive powers," said that everyone has intuitive gifts, and lamented that we use so little of the mind's potential. To make matters worse, just the week before, on the very same program, correct information was presented about the myth. In a bumper spot between the

program and commercials, a quick quiz flashed onscreen: What percentage of the brain is used? The multiple-choice answers ranged from 10 percent to 100 percent. The correct answer appeared, which I was glad to see. But if the producers knew that what one of their interviewees said is clearly and demonstrably inaccurate, why did they let it air? Does the right brain not know what the left brain is doing? Perhaps the Myss interview was a repeat, in which case the producers presumably checked her facts after it aired and felt some responsibility to correct the error in the following week's broadcast. Or possibly the broadcasts aired in sequence and the producers simply did not care and broadcast Myss and her misinformation anyway. Even Uri Geller, who has made a career out of trying to convince people he can bend metal with his mind, trots out this little gem. This claim appears in his book *Uri Geller's Mind-Power Book* in the introduction: "Our minds are capable of remarkable, incredible feats, yet we don't use them to their full capacity. In fact, most of us only use about 10 per cent of our brains, if that. The other 90 per cent is full of untapped potential and undiscovered abilities, which means our minds are only operating in a very limited way instead of at full stretch. I believe that we once had full power over our minds. We had to, in order to survive, but as our world has become more sophisticated and complex we have forgotten many of the abilities we once had" (italicized phrases emphasized in original).

Evidence against Ten-Percent Myth

The argument that psychic powers come from the unused majority of the brain is based on the logical fallacy of the argument from ignorance. In this fallacy, lack of proof for a position (or simply lack of information) is used to try to support a particular claim. Even if it were true that the vast majority of the human mind is unused (which it clearly is not), that fact in no way implies that any extra capacity could somehow give people paranormal powers. This fallacy pops up all the time in paranormal claims, and is especially prevalent among UFO proponents. For example: Two people see a strange light in the sky. The first, a UFO believer, says, "See there! Can you explain that?" The skeptic replies that no, he can't. The UFO believer is gleeful. "Ha! You don't know what it is, so it must be aliens!" he says, arguing from ignorance.

What follows are two of the reasons that the Ten-Percent story is suspect

Brain imaging research techniques such as PET scans (positron emission tomography) and fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) clearly show that the vast majority of the brain does not lie fallow. Indeed, although certain minor functions may use only a small part of the brain at one time, any sufficiently complex set of activities or thought patterns will indeed use many parts of the brain. Just as people don't use all of their muscle groups at one time, they also don't use all of their brain at once. For any given activity, such as eating, watching television, making love, or reading, you may use a few specific parts of your brain. Over the course of a whole day, however, just about all of the brain is used at one time or another. The myth presupposes an extreme localization of functions in the brain. If the "used" or "necessary" parts of the brain were scattered all around the organ, that would imply that much of the brain is in fact necessary. But the myth implies that the "used" part of the brain is a discrete area, and the "unused" part is like an appendix or tonsil, taking up space but essentially unnecessary. But if all those parts of the brain are unused, removal or damage to the "unused" part of the brain should be minor or unnoticed. Yet people who have suffered head trauma, a stroke, or other brain injury are frequently severely impaired. Have you ever heard a doctor say, ". . . But luckily when that bullet entered his skull, it only damaged the 90 percent of his brain he didn't use"? Of course not.

Variants of the Ten-Percent Myth

The myth is not simply a static, misunderstood factoid. It has several forms, and this adaptability gives it a shelf life longer than lacquered Spam. In the basic form, the myth claims that years ago a scientist discovered that we indeed did use only ten percent of our brains. Another variant

is that only ten percent of the brain had been mapped, and this in turn became misunderstood as ten percent used. A third variant was described earlier by Craig Karges. This view is that the brain is somehow divided neatly into two parts: the conscious mind which is used ten to twenty percent of the time (presumably at capacity); and the subconscious mind, where the remaining eighty to ninety percent of the brain is unused. This description betrays a profound misunderstanding of brain function research.

Part of the reason for the long life of the myth is that if one variant can be proven incorrect, the person who held the belief can simply shift the reason for his belief to another basis, while the belief itself stays intact. So, for example, if a person is shown that PET scans depict activity throughout the entire brain, he can still claim that, well, the ninety percent figure really referred to the subconscious mind, and therefore the Ten-Percent figure is still basically correct.

Regardless of the exact version heard, the myth is spread and repeated, by both the well-meaning and the deliberately deceptive. The belief that remains, then, is what Robert J. Samuelson termed a "psycho-fact, [a] belief that, though not supported by hard evidence, is taken as real because its constant repetition changes the way we experience life." People who don't know any better will repeat it over and over, until, like the admonition against swimming right after you eat, the claim is widely believed.

The origins of the myth are not at all clear. Beyerstein, of the Brain Behaviour Laboratory at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, has traced it back to at least the early part of the century. A 1998 column in New Scientist magazine also suggested various roots, including Albert Einstein and Dale Carnegie ("Brain Drain"). It likely has a number of sources, principally misunderstood or misinterpreted legitimate scientific findings as well as self-help gurus.

The most powerful lure of the myth is probably the idea that we might develop psychic abilities, or at least gain a leg up on the competition by improving our memory or concentration. All this is available for the asking, the ads say, if we just tapped into our most incredible of organs, the brain. It is past time to put this myth to rest, although if it has survived at least a century so far, it will surely live on into the new millennium. Perhaps the best way to combat this chestnut is to reply to the speaker, when the myth is mentioned, "Oh? What part don't you use?"

Internet

MY EXPERIMENTS WITH THE CONCEPT OF GOD

I first started worshipping small Idol gods, when my grand mother inadvertently left one of them in our home. She used to carry all her 'Gods' with her wherever she went; they were about fifteen in number. I added few more "Gods" to the one left by her and started worshipping these Gods (Idols) for hours, doing "Puja", cleaning and washing the small replicas of many Gods and Goddesses, putting them in the home shrine (Devhara), offering them flowers, and 'Naivedyam' (something to eat - like a piece of coconut or milk or sugar), at the same time reciting prayers to praise and please them, waving a lamp in hand doing 'Aarati'.

Besides this Puja, in the early mornings and the late evenings we used to have prayers in the boarding school, which my father has started. He was the rector of the school and we lived in the school premises. This was the beginning of my so-called spiritual experience. All this was with blind faith and following the traditions going on for ages.

But my real search for God began at the age of 24. This was the beginning of my spiritual journey with the help of science and not following blindly whatever I was doing till date. Since then I kept thinking, reading and talking on this subject. I read Geeta, Upanishads, books by Swami Vivekanand and many related books. I read books on life of Mohammed Paingambar and studied Jain philosophy.

After many years of thinking, reading and practicing spirituality, I am now totally convinced that the so-called God in Idols or Almighty in Heavens governing the Universe is non-existent. God

is the creation of human mind and if energy is God then we are part of and parcel of god and we have all the strength within us. I therefore do not believe that God exists in Idols in the temples and hence I do not worship the Idols. I never go to any temples. Even if I visit, it has either a historical or architectural point of view, or for satisfaction of the accompanying persons, I never bow there from my mind.

When all our efforts fail we want to shift our responsibility to some one else like “God”. I do not believe God in the form of idol but as an all pervading energy controlling this universe. I do not know offering prayers to this God helps. Believing in such Gods and Goddesses and praying them to help us to overcome our mistakes and shortcomings is escapism. If I have committed a mistake, I have to face the consequences and correct it myself. Such type of conflicts always went in my mind but every time I was convinced that there is no God as the majority of the people believe.

In my quest to know about God and gain spiritual knowledge, I attended eight days residential training in Yoga at the Yoga Institute in Mumbai. Later I attended ten days course of Vipassana at Igatpuri. Later I attended a course of Art of Living and also went to Mount Abu to attend the sessions on Rajyoga arranged by Brahma Kumari’s I even delivered a lecture on Mind and Body techniques of curing diseases. Later I again went to listen to the popular Gure from America, Dr Deepak Chopra, to know scientific basis of spirituality. I also had a very close meeting with the founder of “Swadhyaya” Pariwar Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale. So also the present chief of “Poornavadi” cult Shri Parnerkar Maharaj respectfully asked me to preside over one of his functions.

Despite all these close encounters with noted Gurus and Maharajas in spiritual field, none of them could influence me to become their disciple neither could they convince me about the presence of God.

But the final blow to my search of God and spirituality was given recently when I became president of Dhule and Nandurbar District Superstition Eradication committee (ANS) and read many books and publications on this subject especially regarding the existence of God, spirit and Soul. I recently read a few books published by ANS. One of them was a publication in Marathi titled Atma, Punarjanma aani Planchet (Soul, Rebirth and Planchet) by Prof P R Arde. This gave a new insight to my thinking of ‘Soul’.

A simple example to disprove “Soul” can be seen with our own eyes. It is taken for granted that each living being must have a “Soul”; therefore, the amoeba, the single cell living creature must also possess a “Soul”. We have seen and monitored the activities of the amoeba under microscope, how it moves, and changes shape, swallows food and also have seen how it divides and from one living amoeba, two independent living creatures with same characteristics, same functions and abilities are created. It is fun to observe this activity. It takes less than a minute.

Now the question arises, ‘the original amoeba had a “Soul” when the amoeba divided did the “Soul” divided into two? Or has a new “Soul” entered the newly formed amoeba and if so from where it has come? Which previous birth (and the body) it possessed? Was it a human being who’s had “Karmas” in his previous life made him to reborn in the body of amoeba? Or was it from some other creature from 84 lakhs of different births one has to go through till one gets ‘Salvation’ or “Mukti and Moksha” with his or her good deeds?

Swami Vivekanand says this is only possible through a human birth? Let me quote his own words, “Man is higher than all animals, than all angels. None is greater than man. Even the Devas will have to come down again and attain salvation through a human body. Man alone attains to perfection, not even Devas”.

And now this “Soul” in this amoeba has to rise again to the birth of a human being if that “Soul” wants salvation and “be one with that supreme being” who is governing not only us but the entire universe. What a pity? The amoeba has no natural death. It only knows to live and

propagate by dividing. Therefore its “Soul” has no chance to rise up and attain salvation unless killed by some other means, may be by human being by consuming an amoebacidal drug! This is the story of the “Soul” which I now understand and with such knowledge of “The truth” about the “Soul” or “Atma” how can I believe the teachings of ‘Scriptures’ including Bhagavat Geeta whose total basis is based on the immortality of the “Soul” or “Atma”? Now I am convinced that there is no God as people think, neither there is anything like Soul or Atma. All these are man made.

I, therefore, firmly believe that spirituality is not at all necessary to become a good human being and an ideal person need not be a spiritual person but must follow ethical and moral principles. Many times we see that so-called spiritual persons are totally unethical in their behaviour. Morality and spirituality are different. If one follows moral principles fully he can definitely be an ideal person and an ideal doctor without being spiritual or believing in the God.

Dr R R Tongaokar

*Excerpts from his book **Making of a Rural Surgeon** (An Autobiography)’*

MAGNET THERAPY: Extraordinary claims, but no proven benefits

Magnetic devices that are claimed to be therapeutic include magnetic bracelets, insoles, wrist and knee bands, back and neck braces, and even pillows and mattresses. Their annual sales are estimated to be 300 million dollars in the US and more than a billion dollars globally. They have been advertised to cure a vast array of ills, particularly pain. A Google search for the terms “magnetic + healing” omitting “MRI resonance” yielded well over 20 000 pages, most of which tout healing by magnets. The reader is invited to insert “magnetic healing” into a web browser, and evaluate these spectacular claims.

Many “controlled” experiments are suspect because it is difficult to blind subjects to the presence of a magnet. An example is a randomized trial of powerful magnetic bracelets for the relief of hip and knee osteoarthritis, which reports a significant decrease in pain because of the bracelets. The patients given real magnets could detect them because the magnets often stuck to keys in pockets. Perhaps subjects with magnetic bracelets subconsciously detected a tiny drag when the bracelets were near ferromagnetic surfaces (which are ubiquitous in modern life), and this detracted or otherwise influenced the perceived pain. Patients with fibromyalgia detected which sleeping pads were magnetic by their mechanical properties, by “comfort with firmness” and thus unblinded the study. In a sophisticated postural assay, where magnetic soles were found to decrease swaying, the authors admit that the magnetic soles could have differed in stiffness from the controls. One of us suggested to a believer in magnetic healing that inexpensive refrigerator magnets were thin enough to worn in dress shoes and would be equally “effective”: she was delighted to find this was so. We wonder if a cheap shoe insert would have the same effect. In chronic pelvic pain a double blind study reported improvement owing to the continuous wearing of magnets, but admitted that blinding efficacy was compromised.

For carpal tunnel syndrome pain, a double blind randomized study using magnet therapy, ensured that magnets and shams were boxed individually so the treatments shouldn’t be identified. There was no statistical difference between the magnet and sham, yet both showed an improvement. Hence future studies should include holders and bracelets that do not contain magnets. One of the commonly touted benefits of magnet therapy is relief of low back pain. However, despite a natural tendency to report positive results, a study of the effects of magnets found no effect.

It is relevant to cost benefit ratios in clinical practice that magnets, which are claimed to be therapeutic, have caused financial harm. Money spent on expensive and unproved magnet

therapy might be better spent on evidence-based medicine. More importantly, self-treatment with magnets may result in an underlying medical condition being left untreated. Sadly, some advertisers even claim that magnets are effective for cancer treatment and for increasing longevity; not surprisingly, these claims are unsupported by data.

Magnets are touted by successful athletes, allowed to be widely advertised, and sold without restrictions, so it is not surprising that lay people think that claims of therapeutic efficacy are reasonable. However-even theoretically- magnet therapy seems unrealistic. If human tissue were affected by magnets, one would expect the massive fields generated by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to have profound effects. Yet the much higher magnetic fields of MRI show neither ill nor healing effects.

Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence. If there is any healing effect of magnets, it is apparently small since published research, both theoretical and experimental, is weighed heavily against any therapeutic benefit. Patients should be advised that magnet therapy has no proved benefits. If they insist on using magnetic device they could be advised to buy the cheapest – this will at least alleviate the pain in their wallet.

Leonard Finegold
Courtesy: *British Medical Journal*

IF YOU ARE A PARENT...

If you are a parent, you have many aspirations for your child that may include him or her becoming a doctor, an engineer, scientist or other kind of successful professional. I believe these aspirations are driven by your thinking about your child's future, and her centrality in your life.

Since good education is often the passport to a good future, I presume it leads you to getting your child admitted to a good school. Then you encourage your child to study hard and do well in school exams. To bolster this, you send him or her for tuition classes. This would have primed your child for board exams and entrance exams, thereby leading to admission into a good professional course. Doing well at college increases the probability of landing a good job. And a good job means the child's future is ensured.

I am neither a psychologist nor an educationist, and what I will now state may seem counter-intuitive. I think that these aspirations and actions might be doing more harm than good to your child. To understand why, we need to re-examine some of our fundamental assumptions.

In the first place, I have seen time and again that living for some distant future goal also means you do not live in the present. The distant goal will always translate into an external measure of success, such as exams. And most exam-focused children start forgetting what it means to be a child – to be curious, mischievous, exploring, falling, getting up, relating, discovering, inventing, doing, playing.

Childhood is very precious; precious enough not to be wasted by the artificial pressures of contrived competition, by too many hours of bookish study, and by school report cards that simplistically wrap up an entire human being in numbers.

The second assumption is that education is merely a ticket to socio-economic success. Given the state of our country, this reality cannot be ignored. But restricting education to only this aspect is, I think, a very limiting notion of the aim of good education. The primary purpose of a school is to guide the child in her discovery of herself and her world, and to identify and nurture the child's talents. Just as every seed contains a future tree, each child is born with infinite potential. Imagine a school which sees children as seeds to be nurtured- here the teacher is the gardener who helps to bring out the potential already present in the child.

This is very different from the current view, which sees the child as clay to be molded – where the teacher and parents are potters deciding which shape the clay should take. There is an old (and forgotten) Chinese saying: “Give a seed to a potter, and you will get a bonsai.”

Even in a commercial organization, to make profits we do not have to chase profits. Rather, we need to build an institution that gives every employee an opportunity to do meaningful and fulfilling work.

Create an organization driven by values of innovation, integrity, customer centricity and care. And as you practice these values everyday and moment, you will see that the profits take care of themselves.

Similarly, dear parent, this is my request to you. Do not give up your child’s present to secure his or her future. Give your child the freedom to truly explore life with abandon. In doing this, you will see your child flower into a creative and sensitive human being. And when this happens, everything else – money, social success, security – will fall into place automatically.

Azim Premji
Courtesy: *Times of India*

RELIGIOUS PRAYERS SURELY PAYS. BUT TO WHOM?

Prayer has been with us right from the primitive days of man. Primitive man was an ignorant man, a scared man and also helpless man. At that time the primitive men didn’t know as to how did the various natural forces around him work. For example, he did not know as to why were there days and nights, or the rain and storms, or the floods and thunder in the clouds and even flowing of rivers and shining of the sun, moon and the stars. In his ignorant state, man posited various deities like himself behind every motion or force. Only that these deities were more powerful, their ways were unpredictable and so on. Since the primitive men were ignorant, scared and helpless they imagined that if they prayed to these deities they could win their favour, grace, help and protection. Since the primitive men could not fight with the hostile natural forces they could only pray for the help of the unseen powerful deities. And be it even by chance but the prayer sometimes even clicked and the praying person was saved from the impending calamity. Prayer got a phillip by such instances. Prayer became a routine feature of human life. Prayer became sacred. Fixed methods of praying to the gods developed. Volumes over volumes of sacred scriptural literature came up eulogizing prayer as such. Faith in the efficacy of prayer got stronger as the times passed. There is a firm belief even today that no sincere prayer goes unheard. The following types of instances are cited in the favour of prayer. Once a bird was sitting on a branch of some tree. A hunter saw it and was aiming his arrow at the bird. The bird saw the hunter and was frightened. Just then a hawk was also about to pounce upon the bird. There was no escape for the bird. It was sure to be killed. It prayed to the God for safety. The kind God immediately responded by sending a snake, which bit the hunter, and in this medley the hunter lost his aim and the arrow hit the hawk and killed it. The hunter also died of the snakebite but because of its sincere prayer the bird’s life was saved.

Hundreds of such stories (of course, all imagined ones!) are cited as a ‘proof’ of the efficacy of prayer and even of the God’s existence. Orthodox people as usual, are keen to provide a scientific proof of the efficacy of the prayer. As reported in the Readers Digest recently, a survey was conducted on about 1000 patients suffering from grave illness. Appropriate medical treatment was given to all of them but someone was praying for the recovery of nearly half the patients while none was praying for the other patients. It was found, says the survey, that the patients for whom prayers were offered showed some improvement while the others did not show such improvement. Hence it was concluded that there is a scientific proof regarding the efficacy of the prayer. But I had protested against the findings of this survey saying that the said improvement would be due to the welcome effect of long treatment, general health and positive

outlook of the patients concern, the encouragement they received and so on, not necessarily as an effect of only the prayer.

Moreover, I have pointed, if the efficacy of the prayer was to be tested the groups should have been such that the one of them medicines were given and for the other only the prayer and no medicines at all. This was not done. Medical treatment was given to every patient. Hence as it happens very many times, due efforts are also being made and prayers are also offered and in a cunning manner the credit for the success that should really go to the appropriate efforts (including medical treatment) is given to the prayer.

But have the proponents of prayer considered the following matters? What is negligible percentage of the prayers find fulfillment? Why is the whole humanity resorting more and more to such an arduous alternative as efforts and increasingly turning away from such an easy alternative like prayer? And, lastly, does the God to whom prayers are addressed really even exist?

Persons reared in orthodox culture pray for their success in each matter like passing of examinations, winning of court cases, success in enterprise, recovery from illness, for rainfall, for peace, for the elimination of enemies, success in competitive examinations, success in wars, games and sports and what not. Yet in spite of the prayers offered out of the competing parties only one of them succeeds. What happens to the even sincere prayers of the failing candidates? If prayer has power why should any praying person fail at all? Since sincere prayers are offered for the recovery of dying persons, why should any one die at all? But what do we see? Let alone ordinary mortals, even the saints, prophets and the very incarnations of God, all have died. In 1943 famine some 33 lakhs of people died in Bengal; did not they pray sincerely for their survival? They did, but there was no use of praying. Similarly the sincere prayers of those who died in the Titanic (and many other similar) tragedies were of no use. Similarly, prayers of persons' involved in large-scale calamities all go unanswered. Prayers of the priests of the Somanath temple could not save the temple from destruction by Mahmood Gazni. Millions of such examples of the futility of prayers can be cited. According to me, the prayers are not answered because probably there is no God to answer them.

God, if he exists, is supposed to be an omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient person, kindly in his very nature and ever ready to protect his devotees, and other good persons. If this is so, God's silence in fact unbreakable one, becomes puzzling when his very ardent devotees fight battles and wars and that too in his very name. Temples, mosques and churches are many times attacked but God is silent. God's very ornaments are sometimes stolen and yet God is silent. Morally corrupt people earn a fortune and celebrate and thank him and he is just quite. In spite of the widespread oppression and exploitation of women, child, the weak, innocent and the downtrodden, God is just unmoved.

In the instance cited earlier God responded to the prayer of just one bird and sent a snake to manage matters but what do we find in the whole animal world? There the weak species is the food of the stronger species. We do not find any kindness, pity or concern. There is just cruelty and cruelty. In the animal world every mouth is a battlefield and every stomach is graveyard. Where is God and what is he doing? The way the world is running there appears to be no sign of the omnipotent and kindly God running it.

The argument that God had created a nice world but man has spoiled the God's design carries no conviction because God has created man in his own image, he is god's highest creation and yet when he is ungratefully spoiling the god's design why is God silent? The gross rampant disorder in the world speaks more of his absence than his presence in the world.

These days it can be asked: Is any one really afraid of God? No, not at all. People may be afraid of the police but they do not seem to afraid of God at all. The fact also goes to say that the God does not punish anyone simply because God does not exist. Yet the prevalent belief is that the God even if he does not punish the people for their misdeeds he surely answers their prayers

and people do find benefit from the praying. But the problem is who are the real beneficiaries of prayers?

Of course, as a placebo effect of the prayer persons involved in dangerous situations do develop some psychological comfort but it is only temporary. The real beneficiaries are the expert persons involved in the so believed process of making the prayer more efficacious. They will help the afflicted person for a fee. The fee depends upon the status of the afflicted person, the degree of the affliction, the degree of credulity of the person and also upon the expertise and fame of the adviser, usually a priest or a scriptural scholar. These advisers will tell you that the prayers differ according to the variety of affliction and the particular deity to whom the prayer is to be offered. Then they will also tell the proper wording of the particular prayer, the mode, dress, time, pronunciation, recitation and posture to be adopted while praying. Very often there are food restrictions to be observed by the suffering person. Almost always an appropriate worship is also to be performed to make the prayer more effective. Obviously the priest and vendors of the articles necessary for worship are benefited. Then it may also be told that the prayer would be more effective if it is offered at some particular spot of pilgrimage, at a particular auspicious time etc. Very often on the advise of the experts a particular type of charity is to be made to make the prayer more effective. The priests are invariably benefited in the whole process. On some occasions particular offerings are to be made to the deity concerned, benefiting the advisers and the vendors of the articles offered. The afflicted persons may also be required to purchase a locket or the photo frame of the deity. There may also be particular scripture reading sessions preferably by the priests.

When we observe the situation described above, it will be clear that as a result of prayer the afflicted person may not gain much and in fact he may be a loser in terms of time, attention, and money and yet quite a few parties having vested interests are undoubtedly its beneficiaries. As a cumulative effect of the afflicted person's helpless condition, the general credulity of the people, even of the modern times, and the machinations of the real beneficiaries of prayer, prayer as a phenomenon is very much on the increase. The real beneficiaries of the prayer will even invent occasions for prayers. This is how we come across even mass prayers for rain, for world peace and the like.

Dr. D.D. Bandiste

No More *Thali* (Mangal Sootra) Tying!

It is normal practice for the groom to tie a rope (which they call the *Thali*) around bride's neck. The groom is then free to treat her as his slave and abuse her to his heart's content. This is not very different from buying buffalo, tying a rope around its neck, and pulling it along!

It is said that the *Thalis* tied around a women's neck so that others are alerted to the fact that she is married and, that in fact, she is the possession of so and so (thus establishing beyond doubt the question of ownership). The *Thali* has the function of ensuring that no other man desires her. Should not a man's marital status be made equally obvious? Is it not necessary for us to know to which woman he belongs so that we do not wrongly desire him? Therefore, the *Thali* ought to be tied around the necks of men as well. Singling women out for such a deceptive ritual practice should invite our condemnation. It should be stopped at all costs... It is time we fought such superstitions practices... People who value their self-respect should fight their way through such obstacles, protests and superstitions and use their rationality to live meaningfully.

Periyar
(E V Ramasami Naikar)
Courtsey: *Kudi Arasu*, 11.5.1930

Thali (Magal Sootra): A pendant typically made of gold hung either turmeric stained thin rope or a gold chain which, when worn by women, signifies that she is married. The highlight of a traditional wedding in the South is the point at which the groom ties the *Thali* around bride's neck.

FEAST ON FESTIVAL DAY

*I was only four
my hand in yours
we walked downstairs
to join the kids' fanfare.
As we ran here and there
a new excitement filled the air.
I saw the elders, solemn as ever
Come from the Eid prayer
And came the Imam, man of Quran
Blade in hand, half insane.*

*Tethered to the tree
Fighting to be free
Looking at me
with sadness and fury
The humped white cow
Let out a low bellow?
Its legs tightly bound
Fell hard to the ground
As the Imam, prophet's follower
Cried Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!*

*Blood thick and bright red
Poured out and the cow lay dead*

*Its last valiant attempt
To cheat the decree of fate,
Through the bubbles as he bled
Was a sad whimper it made.
You and the other kids in glee
Jumped and danced in utter victory
while I stood ready to cry
Looking at the white cow's eye*

*You screamed in hysteria
In an undiscovered euphoria
You felt like a man
Like you had just killed a dragon!
You thrilled over the feast
Promised by the death of the beast.
You sang in delight
"Holy" songs of "holy" Eid.
I looked at the white cow's eye
watching it slowly die.*

*I felt the pain as if it were I
Who lay on the grass left to die
on its cheek I saw a tear
I knew death was in the air*

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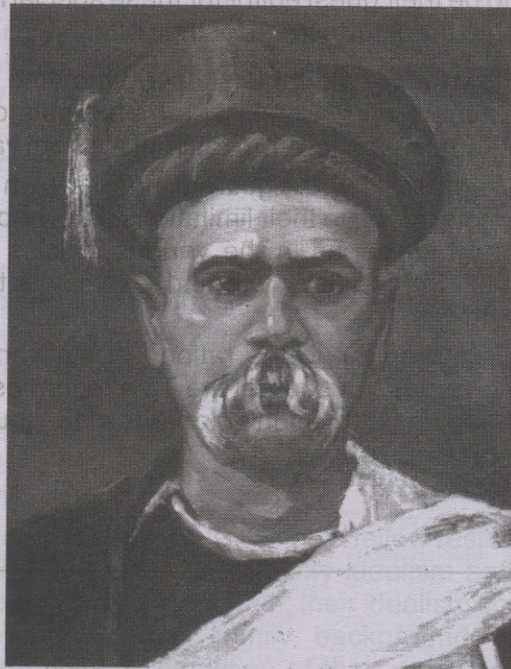
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SPECIAL ISSUE ON

RATIONALISM

**Gopal Ganesh Agarkar**

(1856 - 1895)

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A WORD FROM GUEST EDITOR

Thought & Action is an English Quarterly published by the very powerful as well as popular movement: Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee. This organization is carrying on numerous activities; the basic aim being to create a rational society. The year 1956 is the 150th birth anniversary of Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, the father of the contemporary rationalism movement in Maharashtra. T&A decided to bring out special issues on this occasion. They requested me to be their guest editor for these special issues. I accepted their offer and am thankful to them for their offer.

How far my attempts succeed the time will show. In my attempt to make these 'Rationalism' issues memorable ones, I have approached for contributory articles from rationalists from various states of India.

Unfortunately, the journal has its own limitations and hence my attempts too have their limitations. I am happy that although hedged by a lot of limitations in the various articles spread in the forthcoming issues, the readers will find explained the various dimensions of rationalism. I am thankful to the rationalist stalwarts for their contributions in these issues. Of course, the T&A team deserves all the appreciations for keeping up the high standards of the journal as a mission to spread rationalism in our society.

DD Bandiste

Dr. DD Bandiste was born in July 1923, and was educated in various Universities situated in various states in India. After teaching philosophy in various colleges he has retired as Professor of Philosophy in 1981. He is writing constantly in the various rationalist, humanist, and atheist journals. He has written seventeen books from rational point of view. He is a recipient of Rationalist Agarkar award of 2002. He presided over the annual session of the Maharashtra Philosophical Association in 2004

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GOPAL GANESH AGARKAR

(1856 – 1895)

Gopal Ganesh Agarkar was born on 14 July 1856 at Tembhu, a village across the Krishna River about six km from Karhad in Satara district of Maharashtra.

Agarkar had much checkered school education due to abject poverty. At thirteen, he had to discontinue his education for want of financial support and had to work as an apprentice in the Munsif's office. However strong desire to complete secondary education prompted him to leave Karhad in search of a patron. He literally walked his way to Ratnagiri hoping that one of his paternal uncles would give him necessary support. It did not work out and he had to do all kinds of sundry jobs to sustain himself and even had to depend on charity. When sixteen, he was unexpectedly sent to Akola. His maternal uncle, Sadashivrao Bhagwat arranged for his schooling. Agarkar completed his secondary education. His teachers raised sixty rupees and sent him to Poona for higher education.

He joined Deccan College in 1875. He won many scholarships and prizes, which sustained him during the period. In 1879, he successfully completed his graduation with History, Logic, Moral Philosophy and Political Economy as his main subjects. Agarkar took History and Philosophy for MA examination and passed Master's degree examination in the second attempt in 1881.

Agarkar was married to Yashoda in 1879 when he was studying for graduation. His loving wife solidly stood by him through thick and thin.

Agarkar first came to know Bal Gangadhar Tilak as a fellow resident at the Deccan college hostel. Both were sharing lofty idealism and a painful awareness of India groaning under alien rule; their idealism soon brought them together, despite differing family background and upbringing. They discussed the pitiable condition of their motherland and arrived at conclusion that education alone would serve as panacea for the ills from which our country suffered.

Agarkar and Tilak founded New English School on 1st Jan 1880 in Poona. Agarkar joined the teaching staff of the school in 1881. They also started in Jan 1881 the publication of two weekly newspapers – the Marhatta and the Kesari - the former was in English edited by Tilak and the latter in Marathi edited by Agarkar.

Agarkar and his colleagues in the New English School took lead in founding the Deccan Education Society on 24 Oct 1884. Under its aegis was established Fergusson College on 2 Jan 1885. The ideological differences among the members of the society, in course of time, gradually became acute resulting into a schism. Agarkar continued to be the editor of Kesari till Oct 1887. Agarkar started his own bilingual weekly, Sudhakar in Oct 1888. All through his life, Agarkar remained steadfast to his ideas and ideals. He had the courage of his conviction and never swerved from the goals he set for himself. There was no dichotomy between his thought and action, which cannot be said of many other reformers. The orthodox section of the society found his views unpalatable and therefore, persecuted him to the bitter end. He had the misfortune to witness his own mock funeral organized by his orthodox opponents. His financial conditions were always poor. He had a few ideological friends who helped him.

Unfortunately Agarkar did not enjoy even good health; he suffered from severe asthma. He was fully aware that he had very little chance of a long life. But that did not change his attitude. That he had conquered fear of death is evident from the fact that on his death in 1895, Gokhale found a note and a cash of Rs 30 for his own funeral. On reading this note Gokhale broke down. Agarkar was only 39 when he died. He surely is the modern beacon light for the rationalists.

Dr. Aravind Ganachari

(Excerpts from his book *Gopal Ganesh Agarkar*)

AGARKAR: PIONEER OF MODERN RATIONALISM

There had been a few reformers before Agarkar in the 19th century who thought afresh and gave a new dimension to social issues. They were, to mention just a few, Balashastrri Jambhekar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Mahadeo Govind Ranade. They had different views regarding ancient Indian knowledge and culture. However what they all had in common was a sense of duty and dedication to the social cause viz. awakening the society from its slumber and bringing about social enlightenment. In the galaxy of reformers, Agarkar was the most spirited and dauntless of them all. He mounted an all-out offensive against old traditions and beliefs existing in the Indian society as well as against the British Government policy. Agarkar had to struggle very hard to get his education; so he knew its value well. Immediately after completing his education, Agarkar along with his colleagues founded the 'New English School' imparting 'education of a different kind.' Very soon these young patriots realized that running a school was not enough to reach out to society and create greater awareness among ignorant and superstitious masses. They decided to publish a news paper and Vamanrao Apte and Agarkar shouldered the responsibility of publishing it. Two newspapers, Maratha and Kesari were launched against all odds and overcoming innumerable hurdles. Agarkar became the editor of the weekly, 'Kesari' and started discussing in it several social problems and their solutions. Kesari became the standard bearer of the Reformation Movement. Deeply concerned with irrational, tradition bound thinking, Agarkar dedicated his entire life to the cause of social awakening.

Agarkar was the first person to teach Intense Rationalism in Maharashtra. Unadulterated rationalism, freedom of the individual, and increasing Humanity's happiness in this world had been the main principles of his life. Faultless logic, incontrovertible arguments, fearless outspokenness and undaunted idealism and commitment to the social cause made his writing powerful enough to mobilize people into action.

Role of Kesari

The Kesari's aim was to rouse people from their apathy, mobilize them against British domination and instill into them the love of freedom. To achieve this he criticized Government policy and made people conscious of their rights. Along with this Agarkar also coaxed people to abandon obsolete age-old notions and traditions and accept new ideas.

In one of the earlier issues of Kesari he defined the role and objective of his paper very clearly. Kesari's role was to pressurize the government through impartial and dauntless persistence, act as the watch dog of society to reduce corruption and injustice, enable people to discern what is good for them and what is not to induce awareness among people about their basic rights and to enable them to exercise those rights appropriately. The weekly news paper was also to keep the public informed about mundane matters like sources of employment opportunities, state of welfare schemes introduced by the government and why they never work. Secondly, Kesari wanted to enlighten people and enable them to decide which traditions needed to be discarded and which replaced by new ones, what qualities people needed to develop and how to develop them; in short all that needed to be done for the reformation and progress of society. The third objective was educating people and publishing books in local language to make people aware of how the traditional system of education has become obsolete and required to be changed. Thus Kesari (meaning lion) had the effectiveness of a lion's roar that created alarm in the government as well as the conservative Indian elite.

Political and Economic Issues

Agarkar was not just a reformist as he is often made out to be. His thinking on political and economic issues of the day was equally independent and rational. He had thoroughly studied and probed into the problems of financial poverty of our society. According to him, '... because of exploitation of indigenous crafts and industries and unfair trade practices, the country is systematically robbed and people impoverished.' Another cause was the attitude of the Indian elite that he depicted in a trenchant picture in one of his articles, wherein he compared an educated person's behavior towards his white employer with that of a stray dog pouncing on a bone thrown in the street.

Editors of Kesari meticulously analyzed all political issues and offered reasonable solutions to them. For example, in one article it is written, '...we must develop our trade, use indigenously manufactured goods, tap our basic financial resources, raise capital to establish industries, adopt new farming methods, establish technical schools and formulate our economic policy in a responsible and united manner so as to counter the British who are draining us financially.'

Agarkar wanted people to take their future into their own hands and work hard to improve it instead of blaming the British for their plight and at the same time looking towards the government to provide employment and to carry out all essential reforms.

Agarkar advocated machine run industries, 'to reject machinery because the British have invented it and to continue in the old rut is a hindrance to our progress. We must use scientific knowledge for our development. We must make efforts, be industrious and experiment and work in co-operation with others to improve our life financially.' Our people who have lost livelihood should learn new skills required for working the machines. Founding industries in our country is essential to stop our resources being drained impoverishing us. To explain the nation's economic problems to people in Maharashtra, Agarkar wrote in Marathi. He was aware that the source of all wealth and affluence depended upon natural resources. He recognized that our

farmers' efforts need to be supplemented with finance as well as modern knowledge and techniques. He therefore suggested establishment of agricultural banks giving full details such as raising of capital, range of banking activities, its detailed functioning and dissemination of necessary information regarding agricultural techniques and marketing by a knowledgeable person appointed by the bank. Even one hundred years ago, he was far ahead of the present generation as far as agro-economics is concerned.

Reformation

Agarkar fervently criticized the unjust social structure especially the caste system and status of women, the unscientific ideas from the Puranas and practices like marital relationship, child marriages, forced female illiteracy and prohibition of widow remarriage that condemned women to slavery and all this in the name of religion and culture. He used Kesari as a weapon for his bitter attacks on the ugly social practices sustained in the name of religion and culture.

Agarkar's modern ideas regarding equality (especially gender equality) and freedom of the individual provoked the elites of Maharashtra who were, despite being educated quite conservative. He made a critical study of the caste system and demonstrated how unscientific it was. The ideas of superiority and inferiority of castes were an affront to human dignity and therefore intellectually unacceptable to rationalists. The Pune Municipality, for example, had put up notices like water 'for Brahmins' and 'for Untouchables'. Agarkar insisted that unless these notice boards are removed bickering between the two communities would not stop.

Secularism, the principle that is embodied in our constitution, was cherished by Agarkar at a time when it was not thought of even in some Western Countries. He said, '...We have to set a pattern of behavior as did the ancient wise men; we are as intelligent, perhaps more so, as they were; out of the rules of conduct they prescribed, we should follow whatever is beneficial to us and disregard the rest, replacing the old with new ones which we consider useful. In the fire of new thinking, whatever is weak will be burnt down and whatever is pure will shine forth in brilliance.' No wonder the high caste educated elite were exasperated by Agarkar's views that he so fearlessly expressed. He along with Tilak was jailed for four months.

Agarkar, Tilak and Chiplunkar, in fact, endeavored together to build a generation of zealous young men with national fervor to participate actively in public life for reforming and educating the society. Ferguson College and the Deccan Education Society were formed on sound rational basis and ideological outlook to achieve this aim. Agarkar also believed that mass education was the only device that would help people to think and think rationally, so that they would respect and protect people's life and property and keep themselves away from crime. He believed that courteous and thoughtful behavior can be engendered only through education.

Providing equal educational opportunities for men and women was one of the major points in Agarkar's Reformist program. Both boys and girls should be able to take whatever education they want, get whichever degree they desire, marry whenever they want to and lead their lives the way they choose. He has expressed his views regarding this more than a century ago, 'If men and women are given the same type of education, then men may have to stay at home to look after the children, wash clothes, do the cleaning up and grind flour. It cannot be helped. God did not intend that women alone should face the drudgery, and child bearing has nothing to do with such tedious chores.' '...Besides men should not feel it below their dignity to undertake household chores.' He also advocated family planning through self-control.

The issue of preventing child marriage was dear to Agarkar's heart. So he supported Malabari a Parsi journalist in his effort to get the 'Bill of Consent' passed. For many, passing of this bill was interference in the social and cultural practices of Indians by an alien government and therefore not acceptable. Agarkar's rational defense of the bill was that this practice was detrimental to the physical and mental health of the girl child and it was necessary to adopt legal measures to prevent women from becoming child widow and being treated as property of men. He genuinely believed that if girls stayed longer with their families and acquired proper education their mental

and intellectual growth would be better. An educated girl would exercise better cultural influence on the family after her marriage. While advocating legal measures, he was fully aware that on social issues education of the public at large is essential. But a preventive law would certainly be a step forward. A bitter debate and a subsequent split among the leadership of the two newspapers ensued. The traditionalists led by Tilak were in majority and Agarkar, the rationalist being in minority had to resign from the editorship of the Kesari. This was the beginning of the fall out between Tilak and Agarkar that lasted till Agarkar became seriously ill.

Sudharak (Reformer)

Agarkar started an independent weekly, 'Sudharak' with Gokhale's help. Both believed that discussing political issues alone was not enough. It was necessary to expose the ignorance of society and the social conditions that caused it. The new weekly was to be used as a tool to educate people so that progress could be made in political, social, moral and scientific fields. In its first issue he wrote, regarding the traditionalists, 'Those who cannot but speak arrogantly have not ever heard of how industrious men in other countries through ceaseless efforts acquired knowledge of physics, invented beneficial and labour saving devices and developed rational thinking in political, religious and moral sciences. ... They are not ...the leaders of our people but are enemies. (So we have to fight on two fronts.) Along with initiating social reformation, the intelligentsia in the country should try earnestly for the establishment of local self-government and for entrance to the law councils as elected representatives of the people.' He firmly believed that before arousing people to political problems it was necessary to remove the rampant ignorance in people's minds on religious and social issues. Agarkar sacrificed his whole life for educating the people. He turned down a prestigious job with a fat salary of Rs.500/- a month offered to him by Shivaji Maharaj Holkar and worked for many years as a teacher to impart 'national education'. He worked as the editor of Kesari without any remuneration and incurred public wrath for his fearless defense of women's emancipation. His very purpose of launching Sudharak after leaving Kesari was to advocate freely the social reforms and not start a 'competition' with Kesari. His weekly was not to please anyone or to be under any obligation, nor succumb to any inducement. He directed all his efforts towards the task of bringing about social change in the thinking and behavior of society. He thought that every one should be encouraged to express freely what he thinks is in the interest of society. For him individual and social progresses were not antithetical; the individual would not survive if the community were sinking fast.

Because of his progressive views, orthodox Hindus branded him hostile to Hindu religion, having no pride in its ancient social and cultural achievements. People accused him of having no pride in Hindu religion and the rich ancient Hindu culture because he exposed all the social injustice, slavery of women and lower castes, their forced ignorance and such other inhuman customs and traditions practiced in the name of the 'Sanatan Dharma'. In this connection he explains his stand very lucidly. 'Whatever the conservatives consider as loss of religion, we treat as progress of religion. Abolition of idol worship, discarding the rituals performed in Yadnya, erosion of the caste system and taboos regarding meals and marriages, reading of scriptures and Shastras (by any one), raising the age for marriage and encouraging women's education can in no way harm religion; whereas deliberate ridiculing of a person by calling him untouchable and observing unhealthy and unholy practices during funerals can harm religion. We feel that such traditions produce more misery than social benefits.' Critics accused him and the Sudharak of destroying the Hindu Religion and establishing Christianity and demanded that his activities be stopped. He had to fight the battle alone and had to suffer untold hardships.

Political Views

Agarkar's articles in Kesari and later in Sudharak amply prove that he was a confirmed freedom lover; lover of political as well as individual freedom. He applied the same scientific rationality in

his political writing. Agarkar wanted all freedom lovers not to harbor a false sense of pride in our past achievements but to find out why we were enslaved by the Moguls first and then by the British. He told them not to cry over the loss of freedom but develop the vital spirit if they wanted to live and live well. Agarkar tried to do his best to awaken the people and stir up that spirit. The Indian National Congress was established in 1885. Its ideology, which included National Political Freedom, created political awareness and people began to realize the true meaning of British rule. Agarkar was aware of the role the Congress could play in the struggle for freedom and urged people to join the Congress. At the same time he was saddened with the fatalistic attitude of the people that nothing could be achieved without government help. This gives the rulers increased power and opportunity for further oppression. Agarkar understood the psychology of the vanquished well. Both the audacity and repressiveness of the government on the one hand and the slavish mentality of the people on the other exist concurrently. Agarkar was certainly a great patriot and understood the importance of political power. That is why he wanted that as citizens' people should also develop a political conscience in the wider social context; political power in the hands of those who are still not used to it, tends to be misused. People who are not politically conscious are not able to control and restrain those rulers who attain power without knowing the purpose for which people have given it to them.

Hindu Muslim Riots

During the period 1880-85, some Muslims bred the idea of two different nations- Hindu and Muslim with different religion and culture. This idea suited the British well. Agarkar would never accept this conservative and narrow outlook, as he was convinced that freedom can be achieved only if Hindus and Muslims unite and fight shoulder to shoulder with the alien ruler. When the communal riots broke in 1893, he deplored the riots and tried to educate people so as to prevent their recurrence. He wrote a number of articles on what triggered the riots, how unity could be fostered, the reasoning behind the two-nation idea, and what the leaders of both communities did or did not do for reconciliation, etc. He addressed thus; '...There is no need for us to hate each other. We are both slaves and we need to find a way to progress. As the British say we are both in the same boat. So the safe journey of this boat to the other bank depends on co-operation and friendship with each other. When can this come about? only when we engage ourselves in acquiring knowledge and taking active part in politics through joint effort.' He chastised the London Times for playing up the Hindu - Muslim issue by publishing Ismail Khan's letter that eulogized British rule, branding the Congress a Hindu organization and demanding equal share of power despite being minority and threatening to resort to arms if need be. He advised the Muslims to forget about Ismail Khan and go along with Badruddin Tyabji.

Values in Life

Rationality, Individual freedom, Social parity, Enrichment of life and Faith in Science were the prime values for Agarkar. His thinking was founded in liberalism, Humanism and Scientific Attitude and not in religious considerations like faith and charity. The final truth behind the creation of this world being incomprehensible it was futile to keep arguing about the existence or otherwise of God. The only sensible thing for man was to acquire all possible knowledge of this world and use it for health and happiness of all. Man should find the true meaning of life through his own effort coupled with positive thinking without leaving anything to His wish. A common man generally tends to relate or even equate values and morality with religion. Agarkar, therefore, studied religion deeply from a scientific standpoint and analyzed and exposed numerous obsolete concepts, rituals and traditions that enslave the human mind. On the basis of this study, he justified introduction of reforms and renunciation of harmful practices. He argued that religions do change with changing times; otherwise there would not have been innumerable treatises interpreting religious dictates in as many ways. He had no objection to 'those principles of religion and morality which so far have been proved by their innate worth to

be totally without blemish and therefore beneficial.' But those, which are not beneficial, are certainly not sacrosanct at any time anywhere. He believed, 'Rituals swamped religion; in fact they become the main aspect of religion that harden into tradition. Social life is shackled by traditions that are harmful to man and society. All religious books preach morality but the morality prescribed by religion may not nourish or complement social morality.' How true! The hooliganism, indiscipline and self-indulgence displayed at many religious congregation proves Agarkar's perception of influence of religion on social morality and the need to delink moral principles from the dictates of religious morality. The religious priests insist that God has dictated the moral principles that are enshrined in books like the Vedas, the Bible or the Quran. In contrast, Agarkar's axiom is 'Not God, but man is at the centre of all social relationships and all things in this world.' So instead of religious education we should impart education of moral principles that are approved by all.

Finally one's intelligence should be the ultimate touchstone for moral values according to Agarkar, for; he always adopted an intelligent and scientific approach. He argued, 'since human happiness and progress do not end with sexual happiness and food (as in the case of animals), we think and argue.' A thinking human being can and should become moral on his own without the help of any religious dictates. He would not surrender or capitulate to some imagined powers of nature when he witnessed its marvels; his approach would be that of rational materialism. For him miracles did not exist and mysteries could be solved eventually by direct observation, experience and experimentation. Thus Agarkar's materialism was based on mental strength, intellectual power and commitment to endeavor. He squarely blamed the theory of 'Karma' and the concept of rebirth for all the social injustice that subjugated and enslaved women and untouchables and sustained patriarchy and casteism for ages.

Agarkar worked in the fields of education and journalism primarily to create social awareness. His mission was to set people thinking and take initiative for their own progress without waiting for the government to do it for them. He gave Maharashtra a new perspective of modern reforms. Perhaps this was all that he could do in his short life given his poverty-stricken life and weak constitution. He was much ahead of his time. He gave an entirely new concept to rebuild the edifice of our society that was ridden with resignation, inactivity, depression and fragmentation into castes and creeds. This is what he taught and lived for. In his selfless life nowhere can one find any ambiguity any dithering, or compromise.

Suman Oak

Suman Oak was in the field of education for several years. She was a lecturer in the education college affiliated to the Bombay University and later in the SNDT University. She is associated with the rationalist movement, a member of IRHA, IRI, CSSC, and Stree Hitalarini. At present she is working in the ANS.

ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF RATIONALISM

Rationalism is simply common sense that employs reason to available knowledge to arrive at decisions. Thus, it is a methodology, which helps us to reach certain philosophical conclusions, which we adopt in our life. It is a means to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, and good and evil, etc. It paves the way to choose the right, true and good and reject the wrong, falsehood and evil etc. In essence it enables man to enjoy freedom of his will.

Causality, God and Religion

But, conventionally it is construed as a cause and effect system. In ordinary parlance, surely, every effect has a cause and *vice versa*. This was how the world was considered as an effect

and the cause for its being and becoming was attributed to what is generally called God, a supernatural 'entity'.

In fact the cause and effect system is related to the sequence of events that takes place in this material world – the former event being called the cause and the latter, its effect. Hence it is futile to search for a cause of happenings extraneous to this material world. Since all events are in a continuum, the dichotomy between cause and effect disappears. It is no innovation and more than two thousand years ago, the Vaiseshika philosophy recognised the cause is intrinsic in the material substance itself.

We know that water and steam are two states of one and the same content of matter each of which can be converted into the other. On heating, water becomes steam and on cooling, steam becomes water. Either of them can be a cause or an effect to each other. We can have many other similar examples: glass breaks because it is brittle; man dies because he is mortal. The principle of causality is inherent in the being and becoming of substance itself and hence, the world requires no external cause for its being. Becoming is the inherent characteristic of being: and being without becoming is non-being. There is no duality between being and becoming. Since no way was open to the early humans to answer the cause of things and events, they were inclined to search for a creator as the cause of all causes. Thus the concept of creation was institutionalized. Man became the victim of conformist religion and he could not yet unshackle himself from its influence.

The rust of religion is an outgrowth over what was once thought of as a philosophical line. The concept of God became formidable weapon in the hands of religious leaders. It is posed as an answer to all yet – unanswerable questions. Innumerable superstitious cults, unhealthy traditions, customs and creeds arose as superstructures on the foundation of religion.

But now, the problem is different with us. We have entered a new age of modern knowledge. Science can lead us to arrive at a more correct and genuine philosophical line. This line teaches us not to be dogmatic but to distinguish between religion and philosophy.

Rationalism and Atheism

Believers in God, religion and superstitious rituals are theists whereas those who deny them are atheists. As rationalists we are decidedly non-theists. But, all atheists are not necessarily rationalists. Thinking and behaving according to one's own reason implies freedom. But, curiously enough, we find fascist philosophers among atheists. Fredrik Nietzsche, known as the prince of atheists propounded the cult of superman and became father of fascism. And fascism arose as a political creed to suppress freedom of individual and nations. Martin Heidegger, the German atheist philosopher, supported the fascist regime of Hitler. We must note where there is a check on freedom, there is a check on human reason too. But curiously enough, the freedom-loving atheist Gora denied the objective reality of the world and its evolution and under-rated rationalism and human reason. That is how we hold that all atheists are not necessarily rationalists.

Man and Nature

That man is an integral part of nature is an undeniable fact. He is in the universe and not outside it. In fact, there is no outside to the yet – known universe.

Awareness of surroundings is the property of all life. This awareness increased in various species in varying degrees in the course of biological evolution. It developed in human species to such a degree that we can confidently say that man is the only species who can use its cognitive faculty on a higher level. And reason is an objective category since it depends upon man's perception of the objective laws of nature. Man has achieved the capacity to use his reason in ever – increasing measure in all essentials of his life. His capacity to use reason correctly corresponds with the quanta of knowledge he acquires from time to time.

Rationalist Attitude

Mere negation of god, religion and its superstructures is not itself rationalism. The essence of rationalism is to understand and live accordingly to dictates of one's own reason and consequences. That is why, that I frequently use a simile to explain and elucidate the rationalist attitude: We raise crops in our field to obtain its yield. We clear the field of weeds only to get a better yield. In so doing our aim should not be shifted to clear the fields from the weeds and ignore raising crops in the field. Unless and until we know what we want, what we do not want occupies and dominates the centre of our activity. We are tempted to fight, but not to live up to our reason and conscience. Most of the rationalist minded people and organizations of today concentrate their activity more on what they do not want rather than what they want.

This does not mean that fighting against evil-some lot is not necessary. But, more important is that a rationalist should have a positive and comprehensive understanding. History teaches us that some reformers picked up and fought against one or two of superstitious creeds, customs, and traditions but almost too little effect on society as a whole. They never touched the fundamental routes of religion. They never touched the gates of renaissance. They never grew to the levels of Lokayats or Jains and Buddhists or even to the level of Darshaniks of olden days. Men who were capable of applying their own reason failed to utilise it and wasted their time for more than two thousand years in eulogistic interpretations of the age-old putrid religious texts. Still the practice continues on a larger scale. Religious institutions and their heads are behind all this jugglery. We have to end it by striking at the roots of religion but not by vainly fighting its superstructures. Unless we clearly and correctly have a comprehensive understanding about the relation between the universe and man and between man and his society, we are likely to take decisions inimical to the safety of humankind.

Cosmology: Rationalist cosmology is materialist and physical realist. The various views of cosmology put forth by religionists were all naïve as can be seen by their holy treatises. They started from the baseless anthropomorphic concept creation. Their visible world is very small and limited to their observation by their naked eye. A new age in cosmology was opened when Copernicus discovered helio-centricism and Galileo invented and turned his telescope towards the sky. A galaxy of scientists appeared on the scene and our knowledge of the cosmos began to increase in leaps and bounds. Man is now capable of scaling the universe to the utmost corners. It can now be concluded with certainty that the universe is self-contained in all respects. The term creation has lost its meaning since nothing can ever be created and something can never be destroyed. The term creation and destruction now stand for change from one state to other.

The cosmic structure is space-time continuum of events. The universe is eternal and law-governed. Man is after all a small figment of it. As MN Roy said "Space is the geometrical extension of matter and time is its chronological extension". In other words, space and time are in the universe since they presuppose being. Becoming is the intrinsic quality of being and absolute being is non-being.

Knowledge: That the universe is a continuum of events implies that it is a becoming of events and that it is in perpetual evolution. At a particular stage in the evolution of physical events, a new configuration of matter took place on earth and what we call life emerged. As a consequence of biological evolution, new species emerged and resulted in the appearance of homo-sapiens (modern man) who is capable of not only being aware of the events in nature, but after perceiving and reflecting upon them, could form ideas. This ideation is a physiological process. But the idealists contend that the world is a myth and it is nothing but a reflection of idea. This contention is utterly false since ideas could not precede the existence of human beings.

Knowledge is the basis of idea formation. We may not be able to know a thing in its entirety. But to the extent we know a thing we obtain what is called objective knowledge. In fact, whatever we know of a thing is just objective knowledge. Even what is called subjective knowledge springs

out from objective knowledge. Without perception and reflection, knowledge of anything is not possible. Unless our five senses receive messages from the world outside or inside us, it is not possible to acquire knowledge. The religionists who ignore the truth of it argue that gnanam (knowledge) comes from without, from the unknown and unknowable divine sources.

Truth: As truth is the content of knowledge, and as knowledge increases in correspondence with the growth of socio-cultural and intellectual evolution of man, realization of truth is always conditional upon the growth of knowledge. Since knowledge is not static, and since it grows or changes from time to time, we find corresponding change in truth also. As knowledge can be measured relatively, to the same extent, truth becomes relative. We cannot have absolute truth. To change is truth. But the religionists claim that truth is absolute and that is Brahman. In fact they do not know that absolute truth is incomprehensible. Though this has been recognised in experience by religionists, they adamantly argue and believe in the absolute Brahman which has never been defined or elucidated by any religious pontiff. The concept of Brahman is contemporaneous with the advent of Upanishads. And none of the many interpreters were unanimous in elucidating it and hence there arose different philosophic schools contradicting one another.

Truth is always objective since it is a reflection of the objective world. We cannot have subjective truth independent of the truth derived from the perception of objects. Some philosophers speak of attaining perfection. As a matter of fact, perfection in anything is not possible; but every stage of our action is to be considered in relative terms.

Freedom: Freedom is the essence of life. Some species in the living world attack others to prey and satisfy hunger. But man is the only species that has been organizing armies with millions of soldiers to kill his own kind to achieve an upper hand over others. In spite of his capacity to think, reason, manipulate and assert his freedom, why is man in a mood to exploit and suppress the freedom of his equals?

Here comes the managerial tendency of man, which can be found all through human history. The authoritarianism of religion allured the ignorant with heavenly happiness and salvation after death and dictated them terms of "do's and don'ts" and usurped their freedom. Its authoritarianism is still rampant all over the world. Then came to feudal lords who, in coalition with the religious pontiffs, usurped the freedom of the people in the name of providing them security from unlawful sections and promising them relief from needs. The former looted man's psyche and the latter his physic as well as his psyche. That was how the helpless were deprived of freedom. The renaissance, which has never entered the Middle East and Near East, influenced Europe and freedom of opinion, was admitted to some extent. This gave phillip to Scientific venture and philosophic reorientation. But, religion did not keep mum. It burnt scientists and is still fighting with science and new philosophical schools.

The aim of all science is to find out truth and know the unknown. The purpose of philosophy is to link the knowledge of all branches of science. As a consequence of the development of these schools, we have entered a new age of democracy. This democracy is so nominal that it could not engendered egalitarian trend among the people and nations of the world. It was so weak that it could not contend itself and could not stop the rising of totalitarianisms (d s) and dictatorships. Man has failed to promote democracy into humanocracy. Humanitarian tendency has been filtering in human kind. Present day democracy is more or less akin to feudal lordship and it is meant to rule and govern the people. Though the urge for freedom is inherent in man, he is not able to exercise it due to compulsion from social quarters and conditions. How is freedom possible in a law-governed universe? Here I will quote a passage from my book 'Reason and Unreason': "Freedom is possible only when there is a scope to choose in between alternatives. Unless events are law-governed, and unless we know the law that operates behind the events, how can we choose this way or that? How can we exercise the freedom of our will? Hence, the exercise of freedom, the desire of which is biological reaction of the human individual, is always conditional upon the law-governedness of nature. The problem of freedom,

therefore, does not arise in a chaotic universe. Hence, an understanding of cause and effect which is nothing but an understanding of the sequence of events is a precondition for human freedom." Hence, exercise of freedom does not rule out determinism. And freedom is the value of values.

Morality: Morality is an appeal of conscience. The question of morality arises in the context of one's behaviour in society. It is a question of taking a decision between good and evil. Unless one is rational and applies his reason to judge, how can one know what is good and what is bad? "The innate rationality of man is the only guarantee of a harmonious social order, which will also be moral order, because morality is a rational function" (MN Roy). It is a miscalculation that religion safeguards morality. It is truly untrue. Even today, more than 90 % of world population is religious. Of them, more than 90 % are immoral. If we consider the belief in falsehood as immoral, all the religious people, without exception, who believe in their unholy texts of god, are immoral.

"Morality is human to a rationalist and divine to a religionist. Man is the goal of the former and god, the goal of the latter. By suppressing the free operation of reason and by corrupting moral conscience religion necessarily encourages immorality. Reason not only checks immorality, but also capacitates man to form genuine moral conscience." (Reason and Unreason)

Humanism: We have seen above some of the deductions, which result from the rationalist mode of thought. If rationalism does not lead to humanist way, the only way open to humanity to enjoy freedom of the will and thought and action, it is purposeless to hold fast atheist and moralist views. Of course, we agree that they are necessary deductions that we arrive at when we apply our reason to nature and god. But that is not all. At this juncture let me quote a few prominent thinkers:

"Man is the measure of all things: of things that are that they are: and of things that are not that they are not" – Protagoras

"But for man, the root is man himself"

"Men make their history themselves" – Karl Marx

"Man is the maker of his own destiny" MN Roy

We see that these thinkers placed man at the centre of his activity. History has ignored the humanist aphorisms. Upto now, religion and politics treated man as a tool. Till now in history, man was considered as a means or a ladder for the leaders of religion and politics to go up and up; when and how to put a stop to this ugly position is a question.

A humanist would himself be responsible for all his actions. Either for victory or failure, he would not treat others as responsible. That is how he can become the master of his own destiny. He should be able to swallow the rich fruits of humanhood. That is what rationalism teaches us.

Let me end this essay with a rich quotation from MN Roy.

"(We have) to rescue rationalism from the devastating consequences of skepticism. In the light of modern scientific knowledge, it is discovered that man's rationality is a biological property. Reason is not a metaphysical category. Moral values are placed on a firm foundation when they are referred back to the innate rationality of man. They need no other sanction than conscience, which is not the voice of god, but results from rationality. The discovery of the physical basis of reason and the rationalist's secular sanction of morality frees Humanism from the mystic connotation traditionally associated with it".

Ravipudi Venkatadri

Ravipudi Venkatadri is a founder editor printer, publisher and owner of Hetuwadi (Rationalist Telugu monthly). He had authored more than seventy books on science, religion, rationalism, atheism, and humanism. He was a president of Rationalist Association of AP and India.

PROMOTION OF RATIONALISM

The greatest paradox in the human life is that man is both inquisitive and superstitious. Some people, they are few in numbers, are inquisitive, open minded and rational whereas the majority of the people are dogmatic, and irrational and blind believers. That is the scenario in all ages and almost in all societies with variation in degrees. Thus today even though we live in an age of technological sophistication our social psyche is still guided by the ideas of supernaturalism, miracle, occultism and obscurantism. In Indian scenario though our constitution accepts as our cherished goal the values like secularism, scientific temper and social justice, in practical reality our social life is governed, by and large, by the ideas of communalism, irrationalism, inequality and all sorts of inhuman practices. The latter ideals no doubt represent the sign of decadence and cultural backwardness whereas the former ones are progressive mark for the upward march of the society.

It is a fact that mankind has progressed from a state of nomadic barbarism to the present state of civilized existence because of various factors. Important of them are scientific innovations and philosophical reflections. They have significantly contributed to improve the standard of living and the quality of life. A few individuals, in all ages, have become inquisitive to understand the world around them. They have tried to explore the mysteries of nature and improve the technologies in every age so that there is marked change in human situation and living standard. This very spirit to interrogate nature has helped mankind to improve and progress. But the irony is that in every age even though mankind has been benefited by the innovations and inventions of science the scientific spirit has not been inculcated in different walks of life nor has it been made the cherished goal of social life. This has resulted in the prevalence of superstition, orthodoxy and dogmatism. Even science is not in the service to dispel superstition. On the contrary modern technology has been helpful to spread superstition and all that science is opposed to.

But the question is why do people fall prey to superstitious beliefs? Why does the mind-set of the people remain akin to supernatural beliefs? How is it that the medieval values influence the people so easily and so massively? It is not that easy to find out a simple reason that would answer the above questions. But there are multiple and complicated reasons; dominant among them are the psychological, cultural, economic and political factors.

The popular view that the spread of education can help people to be rational is also not a viable proposition. For in our society we observe that the educated people are more superstitious than the uneducated folks. An illiterate or semi-literate person cannot ordinarily apply a reflective mind to understand the realities of life or social situation. It becomes natural on his part to ascribe supernatural cause or explanation to every problem of life. Whatever would have been explained by natural causes, he adduces non-naturalistic explanation because of ignorance. It is his ignorance that makes him believe in superstitions and supernaturalism. But educated people, who are capable to apply their reason and reflection to understand a situation, do not do so and even, become instrument to spread and deepen their obscurantist beliefs. This is because of the social influence they inherit from their very childhood. From their childhood they are captivated by the bondage of tradition from very many spheres of social life. Even they feel proud of their age-old tradition, however irrational, bizarre, and inhuman it may be. Unless one is open-minded and capable of thinking rationally he remains glued to his social practice and convention because of its deepening influence of childhood.

Most of the time man's sense of fear and insecurity makes him timid to bow down to some imaginary deity with the belief that the god or goddess will rescue him when he is in trouble. Man is afraid of many things for which he worships or prays some imaginary power. Much before a person achieves maturity; he is indoctrinated with the value of worship and prayer. The very concept of prayer is to seek protection at the time of danger. This provides a psychological solace to a person to face the realities of life. The irony is that people instead of

having a sense of social obligation to live honestly become dishonest with the belief that prayer, worship and religious rites would remove their sin. In society corrupt and dishonest people take great interest to build a place of worship. The construction of a religious shrine or performance of religious rites, through whatever means, is considered a respectable work in society.

Corruption, dishonesty, violation of civic values etc. are common phenomena in societies, which are governed by religious sentiments. It is a common practice that religious sentiment prevails over civic responsibility in such societies.

Again in a society where sense of civic values and moral accountability is low people ordinarily become otherworldly. When they are deprived of basic things of life they are guided by the belief that that is their destiny, which is predetermined. Consequently they are carried by the unfounded belief that their condition would improve if they have divine grace with them. So they are passionately engaged in propitiating any god or goddess with the hope to get divine grace. This world is neglected and hence it goes from bad to worse.

Further people are guided into believing that only divine grace can remove all evil and even punish the guilty. In most of the serials and cinemas this is the message that is being imparted to the people. The mass media like television, newspaper etc. goes on advocating a philosophy, which makes an average man believe in supernatural agencies. Unless one has a reflective and critical bent of mind one is likely to be guided by such beliefs, which loom large into the social scenario.

The economic and political situations also contribute to the prevalence of a non-rational mind-set. Some people who still have the benefit of social superiority get many privileges from the existing system. The priestly people, who are the influential group due to their social inheritance, are supporters of the unjust system in the name of tradition. Besides, people who are in the helm of affairs and are capable of influencing public opinion are not prepared to abandon this system that directly or indirectly benefits them. They remain indifferent to religious issues however bizarre and meaningless they may be. They are not prepared to fight issues, which are likely to annoy the public and bring them social opposition. Whether they believe or not, political compulsions make them timid to question the provocative religious issues. Even some political organizations find it convenient to exploit religious sentiments of the people and give up their secular credentials for political expediency. If the social environment by and large is antithetical to the spirit of free thinking, scientific temper and secularism, the educational institutions also cannot remain away from it. And religious beliefs are impressed upon the children from their school days, suppressing their inquisitiveness and reflective bent of mind. All these factors cumulatively add to the strengthening of the ideals that stand opposed to rational and scientific temper.

The atheists, rationalists, agnostics and free thinkers are a small minority and always in a disadvantageous situation. Even though they are inquisitive, lovers of peace and work for the amelioration of human condition, they have not been easily accepted by the contemporary society. Eminent scientists who have significantly contributed to the growth of human knowledge have undergone great suffering in the west. Similarly many humanists and reformers have been ostracized and even tortured in India for asserting human rights and dignity. This opposition to free thought and rationalism has always come from the religious-minded people who think any knowledge or social reform is a threat to their world of beliefs. Since religion has been a major cultural force, its appeal on the psyche of the common man still looms large. Despite being honest, truth seekers, and possessing a high sense of social obligation, freethinkers and rationalists are looked down in their contemporary society as heretics and atheists. It may be Socrates, Bruno, Galileo, Phule, Gora, Periyar, Agarkar etc. who are non-conformists and pioneers of free thought. Progress of knowledge and the assertion of human rights and dignity have been possible due to the free thinkers who have brought revolutionary changes in human society. Despite all odds and obstacles they have shown the path for moral and intellectual elevation of mankind.

Still we, the rationalists have nothing to feel complacent rather we have miles to go to usher a cultural renaissance in the society. We have to think of strategies. We need more reflection on how to popularize rationalistic and humanistic ideals in all spheres of social life. If we, the rationalists, free thinkers, agnostics and atheists join hands together we can be a force enough to counteract the evils of dogmatism supernaturalism, communalism and injustice. We can replace untruth with truth, credulous mind with scientific temper, dogmatism with rationalism, injustice with justice and otherworldly attitude with the humanistic concern. That would really bring a cultural transformation and vastly improve the quality of life. For, the more rational and humane people become, the further we march towards justice and egalitarianism.

So it is an onerous task to educate the people and particularly the young children from their impressionable age. We have to make them inquisitive, open-minded and lovers of truth. We have to give great thought how to design our educational curricula so that students learn the value of free-enquiry and the right to question. We have to think of strategies to counteract the massive propaganda carried out by obscurantist who distract people's attention from the realities of life and make them otherworldly. We have to make people to think that human situation can be improved upon by human endeavor only and not by any supernatural power, even if there exists any power in any part of the cosmos. Of course, one has the right to believe in God or religion. But such beliefs should remain at personal level and there should not be any fanfare on the basis of religious beliefs. The secular state should not give any patronage to religious acts. Further, there should be legal provision to stop spread of superstition as it has been done in the case of untouchability and slavery. Actions should be taken against persons who trade upon the ignorance of the common people and spread untruth under the garb of religion and spiritualism. Thus a concerted effort is required to spread scientific temper, spirit of enquiry and humanism. These are the universal ideals that can usher in the intellectual and moral elevation of society. No society can be a progressive one by opposing or remaining indifferent to these basic values.

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INTERNATIONAL RATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Looking back on the last two centuries, humanity can celebrate the triumph of reason, progress and emancipation. The tyrant gods have been exposed as paperboard monsters. The cruel and violent forces that governed throughout the dark ages in their name have been driven out of a major part of the world and of human minds. The wheels of progress are rolling with enormous speed. Scientific research and technology are improving our lives and extending our horizon and potential. These achievements have been possible under the influence of a strong and irrepressible rationalist movement that braved harassment and backlashes to break one by one the chains of mental slavery and make us the masters of our destiny. But there is no time to rest on rationalist laurels. The victory lasts only as long as we are watchful and ready to defend and extend the empire of reason.

Religion has a tendency to creep back into liberated territory in ever-new shapes and to try and recapture lost bastions. Once cornered and weakened, it can hibernate and return in fundamentalist, sectarian and neo-religious strings. With the Iranian revolution, Islamic fundamentalism went political and tried to recapture parts of the world, provoking and encouraging Christian fundamentalism and Hindu fundamentalism. The weakening traditional Christian churches in secular Europe and America sprouted a multitude of zealous evangelical missionary movements to target the developing world. Revival movements like the hyperactive Pentecostals, born-again Christians, hysteric faith healers and bizarre cults came up. In India,

fading Hinduism reared in a fanatic Hindu nationalist movement besides becoming fertilizer for thousands of colorful and scurrile god-men, who are increasingly drawing rich devotees from the spirituality hungry west. Despite the multitude and sometimes wildness of religion's new faces, Rationalism has established itself as the general frame of reference in today's world. There have been many excellent and courageous individuals and determined and dedicated movements, who contributed significantly to today's achievements.

Outstanding landmarks in the history of modern rationalism are the lectures of Robert Green Ingersoll in the USA and the publications of rationalist books by the Rationalist Press Association (RPA) in Britain. Ingersoll with his great oratory skills and outspoken views about religion romanticized heresy and became an inspiration for thousands of people not only in the USA but all around the world. His direct and trenchant criticism of religion, his great desire for a rational and liberal reformation of the social order, and the charm created by his fine and touching language enlivened with passion and humor were unique and not heard of till then. Ingersoll became so popular that he was considered a suitable candidate for the office of the president of the USA. His example shows that bluntly speaking out against religion and its institutions can meet with overwhelming public response.

In Britain, the RPA started more than one century ago to spread rationalist thoughts in classical and contemporary books of high standard. The "Thinker's Library" and the "Cheap Reprints" reached far off places and opened up new horizons for progressive movements in many parts of the world, making a lasting impact on the history of rationalism.

Indian Rationalist Movement

It was under the direct influence of these two great heritages that the rationalist movement in India, emerging in the beginning of the 20th century out of ongoing social struggles against priesthood and religion based oppression, grew and sharpened its intellectual weapons. Thanks to an uncompromising determination deeply rooted in its fighting origins, it developed over several decades into an influential factor in transforming the mindset of one of the most tradition-bound societies in the world. The Indian rationalist movement is considered one of the most vibrant and most successful movements of its kind and has been in recent years highly appreciated by western observers.

Bill Cooke in his book *The Blasphemy Depot* admires its "practical rationalism in action" and wonders, "what Indian rationalism can teach the West". He feels that "in India the malevolent consequences of irrationality are better understood" than anywhere else. Paul Kurtz, in his speech "The Momentous Significance of Rationalism Today", during the International Rationalist Conference 2002, expressed the belief that the Indian rationalist movement has a "special and perhaps momentous role" to play in helping "to bring India into the twenty-first century" and congratulates the Indian Rationalist Association "for the leadership role it has played". These are not only good words. In fact, the Indian rationalist movement has become an inspiring example for many western rationalists to awaken, activate and rejuvenate their own organizations.

Paul Kurtz describes rationalism as 'the single most important contribution to human civilization'. Rationalism strives to influence society towards secularism and to liberate individuals from the influence of religion, superstition, dogma and priesthood. It promotes liberty of the individual and human dignity, fights for the fulfillment of human rights, for freedom of expression, the right to criticize traditional religious dogma and all arbitrary assumptions of authority. Above all, it raises powerfully the voice of reason to expose all pseudo-science and baseless fantasies imposed upon people.

The salient point of any rationalist movement is its fighting spirit and its determination to defend what it stands for against all odds. Rationalism commits the liberated individual to reason even if it is uncomfortable. Every step towards progress, freedom and equality has been influenced by the voice of reason, resisting efforts to silence and strangle it. The fruits of modern

civilization did not just fall from trees; they are the achievements of courageous people defying the established order and the parasites protecting it.

Rationalist Agenda for the 21st Century

The rationalist movement has not only survived the attempt to pervert it, it has even gained new strength and extended its influence far into "humanist" territory. The challenge gave opportunity to reconsider and refocus positions and policies and to consolidate rationalist work. In fact, the repulsive and unenthusiastic example of dull and meaningless club culture revived the inspiring vision of rationalism breaking open the prison doors of ignorance, superstition, exploitation and oppression. Rationalists of all names insisted that rationalism, atheism, free thought and even humanism is not just another way of life or one among other religions. It does not accept to be reduced to the level of playing its part in the symphony of a religion oriented / dominated society – it wants to transform this society and free it from religion. It does not fight for equality in conformity – it aims at a radical change of the status quo.

Imagine a small "equalist" group in South Africa holding the view that people with black and white skin are equal. In order to be 'positive' and to avoid the idea of fighting apartheid, they limit their aims to seeking acceptance for their own view as another way of life, equally justified as that of the racists! Or a group of "white jackets", uncorrupt government employees, who come out and claim their right to refuse to take any bribe. They would not like to be accused of "corruption-bashing", and only insist that their way of life is just as respectable as that of the corruption Mafia! Surely both these groups would be as happily welcomed by racist or corrupt regimes as the "humanists" by church loyal governments and state churches. Such self-centered movements have the potential to bind and channelise all possible resistance against the oppressors. Despite their seemingly progressive positions they are therefore in effect reactionary.

Rationalist International

Rationalism started historically as criticism of religious texts and challenge against religious establishments and their influence on society and individual. During the last centuries, it underwent an evolution. "The great challenge today is to resist lethargy and hidebound traditions and extend the methods of reason and critical thinking to all areas of human interest," writes Paul Kurtz.

Modern rationalism strives for a post-religious society. It investigates and exposes traditional and new (age) paranormal and other claims of supernatural powers and miracles. It asks for a secular society where state and religion are absolutely separated and religions are not promoted or supported. It condemns fundamentalism and acts of violence and intolerance, and tries to prevent them. It encourages freethinking and free inquiry and self-determination, and helps individuals to break the chains of mental slavery. It promotes fulfillment of human capacities and wishes and encourages imagination and fantasy and strong emotions guided by reason. In its broad stream, it includes and accommodates all movements that focus single or special aspects of rationalism, contributing to the common line of emancipation of human mind; they are atheist groups, denying the existence of divine powers and empowering human beings instead, free thought and secular-humanist groups focusing on social and political issues, skeptic groups dedicated mainly to the exposure of paranormal claims and any other movement in this frame that may eventually emerge in future responding to new challenges and problems. The Rationalist International, founded in 1995 during the first International Rationalist Conference at New Delhi as a forum for rationalist ideas and positions with worldwide concern, could become a vanguard of the movement, giving inspiration, clarity, strength, courage and solidarity to many rationalists in different parts of the world. Responding to new challenges of irrationalism and intolerance and identifying and encouraging the use of new ways and methods of influencing change, including Internet, television and any other new achievement of

information technology, rationalist movements in all parts of the world have to grow and grow together into a force capable, courageous and determined to influence the course of human history.

Sanal Edamaruku

Sanal Edamaruku lives in New Delhi and leads the Indian Rationalist Association and the Rationalist International. The Internet based Rationalist International Bulletin edited by Edamaruku and coming out in English, French, Spanish, German and Finnish languages is perhaps the most influential. He has written twenty one works, including two novels and several hundreds of articles, on various aspects of rationalism, humanism, secularism, and ethical politics.

RATIONALITY AT STAKE

While going through the special report 'Faith in spate' one wonders the extent of ecological damage caused under the name of faith. It is argued by believers that the rituals devised by organized religions protect the environment and natural resources unintentionally and/or unconsciously. As such the environmentalists approved the religious practices in the hope of preventing pollution and on-slaught of nature. This might have been true in the past since human greed was within the limit. But the special report reveals a different story. The damage caused by the overzealous devotees is much more compared to the insignificant contribution to protect the nature. The main reason appears to be the lack of rational thinking, which is at stake due to superstitious practices undertaken in the name of religious belief.

On the one hand, the saints and religious scripts advocate that God is omnipotent and omnipresent and on the other, followers of self proclaimed present day religious leaders, Babas and Devis seek blessings of God at a particular place and at a particular hour. This ill-advice and insistence is causing damage to nature and draining out natural resources since God-seekers crowd in millions at religious places at auspicious hour/day. At the same time, merchants of God and trading community exploit this religious weakness to make fast buck without caring for environmental damage. In fact, most of the believers visit these religious places just as outing and for fun rather than pious feelings. This can be clearly seen during Ganesh festival in Maharashtra, Dasara festival in Karnataka, Durga Pooja days in West Bengal, during Diwali festival in Northern states, during Christmas holidays in Goa and many places all over the world.

This crowding and demand of physical comforts by devotees put enormous pressure on civic administration. In turn administration demands huge funds for slipshod measures. These measures are not adequate; but funds vanish in the pockets of officials and contractors leaving devotees to suffer and causing damage to environment. Under such conditions there is a need for common sense (rational!) approach even if one believes in supernatural powers, which promise material and spiritual abundance. Opinion makers should come out with some methodology to curb these practices and to stop pampering the devotees who are bent upon damaging the environment. Let us hope that rationality will prevail over faith and the believers will do some rethinking while planning their visit to these place.

CASTEISM AND RELIGION

The two social evils that have been standing against humanism are casteism and religions. One can quite reasonably see that both the age-old evils are founded on rather out-dated theories and unreasonable assumptions. They had been – and will keep – dividing people and inducing them to fight and massacre each other. In today's world, casteism and religion are facing a danger of losing their ability to serve. Mostly because of the ever-forward march of science we live in a time that sees the obliteration of the "core values" of cast-religion duo. The new findings

and evidences on how the universe came into existence and how the very life took form are powerful slaps to the falsehoods propagated by religions.

We, the flag bearers of humanism and rationalism, do have a historic duty or mission – to throw away the religion and evils sponsored by it and to become propelling force of scientific stand so that eventually our society will be liberated from castism and religiosity.

The first move on our part ought to be joining this movement equipping ourselves with weapons of ideology. It is easy for one to be religious. All it requires is to follow the so-called sacred doctrines. But being a rationalist is pretty difficult. If you want to be a rationalist you need to have a comparative understanding of various religions. The deeper you dive into them the more vivid do the contradictions appear. You also need to have a wider understanding about modern science, which spreads into various branches. This time you end up having a unified thought system agreed upon by all. Having had this part done, the primary part is over. The quest of knowing things and enabling reason pays well later on.

The next phase is to be a volunteer for the great cause of humanism or rationalism. Here we take the responsibility of a teacher, to change the attitude of the society we live in. Teach them what is rationalism and how important it is to be rationalist, to build a better and a just society. These teachings and inductions will influence other person; and these persons in their turn influence still others around them and the process spirals out into a huge social impact. It will have no room for religiousness such as dowry-related religious weddings and idiotic after death ceremonies.

We should not stop right here, since the impact created can dwindle down to nothing sooner or later. The third phase is to build up organized actions. We should assist or facilitate formations of small, medium and large organizations working on this line. Later on we need to coordinate these into collective effort.

Let the organizational network be like the one outlined below:

- A state unit for a state; a district unit for a district; a taluka unit for taluka; and a local unit for a ward or for a village. At the top of this structure let us have a central committee, which supervises or carries out the decisions taken across the structure.
- The activities that can be carried out: Notice, propaganda, pamphlet distribution, publishing periodicals (and journalism), publishing books, putting poster news, arranging speeches and study circles, conducting seminars, propaganda using vehicles, arranging meet-the-press, special attractive programs for visual media, celebration of unit anniversaries, divine miracle exposure program, production of documentaries etc.

With these programs we can successfully resist and destroy forces that stand against humanism. Rationalism has, no doubt, the power to defeat the institutions erected upon the base of spiritualism. If we can successfully encourage scientific outlook and rationalism the final victory is ensured for the humanist movement based upon rational outlook.

Sreeni Pattathanam

He is a General Secreatry of Bharateeya Rationalist association, Kollam, Kerala

RATIONALISM AND SCIENTIFIC TEMPER

Jacob Bronowski once stated, 'we are a scientific civilization, i.e., a civilization in which knowledge and its integrity are crucial.... Knowledge is our destiny.' Rationalism is a mundane philosophy. It is concerned with whatever happens on this earth and not with otherworldly affairs. And yet even for man's behavior it does not give any commandments, does not stipulate any dos and don'ts as is done in most religions. It is science of conduct rooted in

emotion and guided by intelligence and like all true sciences it is always provisional and tentative without dogma. Its basis is empirical knowledge (as opposed to transcendental ethics) gained through perception, observation, experience, experimentation and inference. Instead of faith in god and totally depending on him to provide everything, a rationalist would rather have confidence in himself and his abilities and depend on his own efforts. He has faith in basic things like one's own existence, the existence of the external world, trustworthiness of our sense organs and above all he believes in intrinsic human rationality. Inborn human rationality is evident every time we make a choice and try to justify it. Even for defending irrational beliefs like existence of ghosts, Bhanamati, etc., one takes recourse to rational arguments. Rational ethics is different from religious ethics. It includes universal brotherhood not because we all are 'God's Creatures' but because of our innate rationality. Rationalism has a positive program of inculcating humanist values of freedom, human dignity, compassion, cooperation and purity of means and now conservation of the environment has been added to it as it has become essential to save the earth. It certainly not hedonism as it opposes crass consumerism and all economic prosperity that can mortgage our future generations. All these values are secular values needed for human conduct in this material world, here and now. They are, moreover, rooted in our innate tendencies. Man is born with the propensity for cooperation and compassion, urge for freedom and the curiosity to know. He is born with the ability to understand and discern and acquire more and more knowledge.

The rationalists believe that religion and god are both man's creations and there is great need to examine all religions. But the religionists never allow any critical reexamination of their religion and anything said in contradiction to their prophet, his word, the scriptures or even their traditions and rituals is considered blasphemy and is severely punished. This causes a lot of tension among various religions. The only way to remove these unnecessary tensions is to inculcate rationality among people so that they can see reason. A society that is prepared to do this rethinking and reexamining their religion can progress. The rest lag behind. And the interesting part of the dogmatic religionists is that they are ever ready or even the first to take advantage of all comforts and facilities generated by science and technology and even use the most advanced destructive weapons to spread their message and obliterate their adversaries; but they vehemently oppose scientific outlook that may induce their followers to examine the claims of their religion.

Examining a religion can be done within the framework of our constitution. We are not eradicating the religions thereby. More over a government possesses the right to interfere in religious observance if it creates law and order problems. Our society is neither secular nor rational. Sometimes the behavior of religious minded people is so irrational that criticism of religion becomes unavoidable. Just recollect the times when our most popular deity Ganpati, almost like a mundane creature, started drinking milk. The whole society went berserk. The price of milk soared sky high. Even our religious(?) Chief Minister of that time fed this deity with milk to the great applause by his followers. Many such sensational incidents are taking place daily causing harm to individual and society and diverting our minds from the real problems of poverty unemployment and many other issues. It is high time that instead of pandering to the self declared religious luminaries, the government along with other sane members of the society commit themselves to the critical reexamination of all tenets of all religions.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar is executive president and founder of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti (ANS), an Organization trying its best for last fifteen years to eradicate deep rooted superstitions prevailing in the Marathi speaking areas of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. He has written number of books on rationalism, scientific temper, eradication of superstitions etc.

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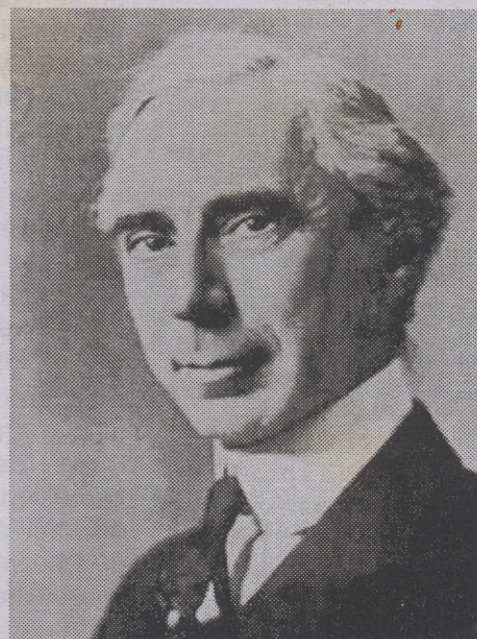
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SPECIAL ISSUE ON

RATIONALISM



Bertrand Russell

(1872 - 1970)

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SPIRITUALISM AND THE SPIRITUALISTS: A CRITIQUE BY A LAYMAN

Y. J. Mahabal

Editorial

Through the present and previous issue, we have tried to present to the readers various aspects of rationalism as a philosophy of life. These issues should have been richer in contents had all the stalwarts approached by us found time to contribute. We especially miss the contributions from such famous rationalists as B Premanand (Tamilnadu), Sardar Bhure Singh (Punjab) and Dr Ramendra (Bihar). Let us hope that they will oblige the readers soon in future. And yet, no philosophy of life can be completely presented in the two issues of a quarterly like Thought & Action. If the readers feel that some particular aspect is conspicuously missing in these two issues together, they are requested to point out the same to us.

Rationalism as an alternative to religious way of life is yet to develop. It may take a few hundred more years provided the rationalists are constantly active and alert in their endeavour.

RATIONALISM AND THE EXISTANCE OF GOD

Frankly speaking, rationalists are forced to discuss god. They would very much like to avoid discussing this topic. Some of the reasons for the rationalists dislike discussing this topic are the following.

Empiricism is the basis of the present rationalism and god is generally believed to be supra empirical in nature. Obviously entities like the god, soul, and the angels lie beyond the meaningful discussion of rationalist nature. Since there is no objective basis when we discuss god the contending parties cannot reach any agreement. This has been the case for thousands of years, and no improvement can be expected at any time. So there is no use of discussing this topic.

Moreover, rationalists feel that the urgent and burning issues like misery, injustice, pollution, population explosion, gross imbalances, social discrimination, concentration of wealth and power in a few hands call for our immediate attention than discussing god a remote and futile topic.

Then again now, scientific explanations are pushing god as an explanation of every thing into background. The more the man knows the less does he need god to explain the worldly events. In future, we can expect a still greater marginalization of God. Hence why discuss god at all?

And again rationalists know that as soon as the rationalists put forth their above-mentioned position regarding god, people reared that they are in the theistic traditions of thousands of years stop hearing even the other reasonable propositions of the rationalists. This is so even with the highly educated people. Hence, rationalists would very much like to avoid discussing god.

Faith

If this is the case, why are we discussing the topic at all? The following is necessity of discussing the topic even by the rationalists. Belief in the existence of god, soul, angels, god realization, heaven, hell, necessity of worship, prayer and rituals are matters passed down as unquestionable, sacred matters of faith. Not only is questioning denied regarding these so called sacred matters the proponents of faith criticize reasoning as something not only incomplete but even harmful for the society. Faith is praised sky high and reasoning is condemned so much so that people reared in orthodox tradition read their scriptures not only blindly but even enthusiastically although they may come across numerous contradictions and indigestible things in their scriptures. The nature of faith is such that it creates apparently convincing explanations to justify whatever odd is stated in the scriptures. Be it even false or a temporary one but faith provides security to the believers. If some proof is given by the faith falls flat the particular faith will not get dislodged; it will create another proof to justify itself. Now, such a dogmatic mindset of persons cherishing unflinching faith in supernatural matters goes against the very mindset of the rationalists. And hence rationalists are compelled to counter this sort of irrationalism. In this process they are required to discuss among other things even god.

Most of the people are still theists. They argue that in the kingdom of God everything is fine; all is well. Hence instead of trying to improve the world they develop the mentality of reconciliation and

being happy in whatever the circumstances. People become fatalists and docile. All their intelligence gets busy in explaining as to how every thing evil is in fact good in disguise. God's will becomes the explanation of every thing. So much so that people keep on suffering even the undeserved insult and misery. That is why M N Roy concluded that people must revolt against God. In his opinion, revolution against God is the beginning of all other revolutions. Rationalists also feel that the real use of human head is not when it meekly bows down but when it thinks, reasons and questions. If questioning is all pervasive questioning the role of God automatically comes within purview of rationalism.

The theists invariably adopt according to the rationalists a very queer stance and hence the rationalists are forced to combat it. The stance is that the super natural explains the natural and not the other way round. The unseen and invisible becomes the really real, in fact the ideal. Hence the believers in the invisible God can afford to say something about God without the fear of being proved wrong. What I say can be verified from the fact that as are the people so are their Gods. Gods dress as their creators dress, eat what the people eat, speak the language their creators speak and even have wives, children, servants and palaces as the people do have. People differ so the gods they have created differ. Scripture say what the people wish to say through their gods. In spite of this obvious fact the created gods become more real than their creators. The situation becomes topsy-turvy; it very many times becomes violent. Naturally rationalists have to step in to set the matters right; they cannot afford to allow this irrational drift to go from bad to worse. Lastly the rationalists are also forced to discuss God in order to uplift the people from their irrational and unscientific ways of thinking. In ancient days the ignorant people believes that every motion in the world was caused by some deity or other. Thus there came up wind-god, rain-god, and so on. People believed that the rain-god makes the rainfall. But now we know that such question as who makes the rainfall is a wrong question. The proper question is: how does the rain fall. So also, who runs the body or who runs the world are wrong questions. They invariable led to the positing of the soul and the God. The proper queries are: how does the body/world run? And some verifiable answers can be given. Rationalists point out that as regards the occurrence of natural events process-based explanations should be sought and not the entity-based questions.

Concept of God: Its Reality and its Utility

Two issues are very often mixed up regarding God: his reality and his utility. That is why; quite often it is argued that since God's existence is useful we should accept him also to really exist. It is argued, for example, that the rewards and punishments by God will make men moral; universal brotherhood among men would emerge if we accept God as our father; so also God's being there will function as a supporting agency in our period of crises, success of the true and good would be assured when the almighty God is believed to be there; and so on. But if we examine the matters coolly, we will find that the so-called advantages may have been there in the ancient times; at least now they do not seem to be there. People may now be afraid of the police when they do something wrong but they are hardly afraid of god. These days fear of God is not making people moral. Then these days fatherhood of God plays greater role than the brotherhood of man. In the situations involving crisis the numerous social supportive agencies provide a more concrete help than what the placebo effect caused by the belief in the presence of fictitious God can. The less said about the ultimate victory of the true and the good is assured by God being there, the better it is. It can be asked: if the good, kind and the all-powerful God is there, why has the evil originated at all? Now, not only that the so-called ancient advantages of God's presence are not there, there are definite disadvantages caused by the positing of (even a fictitious) God. Various conflicting groups wrongly believe that the God is behind only them and not behind the others. Thus even now, there is more bloodshed in the name of god (and religion) than in any other name. For any worthwhile improvement in the world, now faith in man must replace the faith in the (existence of) God. But the real problem is: not that it is advantageous to accept God but whether God exists as a reality. Fictitious characters in novels very often generate a welcome effect. But this does not mean that those characters are real. The reality of God must be convincingly proved independent of any other

considerations. This according to me has never been proved. In fact it can never be proved. The believers turn around and ask: Can you prove that the God does not exist? Let us see as to what can be said about this counter-question. The accepted custom is that whoever claims that some thing exists or is real. It is his responsibility to prove his claim. He cannot ask the opponent to disprove what he has himself claimed. Since the rationalists have no particular position to hold in this regard they can only point out the defects in the thesis of the theists. Hence, our attempt will show that what the theist claims can in no way be held.

If God is only spiritual in nature, where from has the inert matter come? And again from a material and natural world, the existence of a spiritual and supernatural God cannot be proved. If God is perfect, kind, good and the source of all that exists, wherefrom have come the imperfection and evil of various sorts? If God is the creator of everything, is he also the creator of Satan and the hell? If God has created pure and mutually equal souls, why does he decree an unequal fate for them? Does God not become the originator of the inequalities etc. in the world? If causal principle is supposed to lead us to God, we can ask: what is the cause of God? If God can be without a cause, why so cannot the world be? Why should the world need an external cause at all? The world as we find it i.e. having all sorts of disorders, disharmonies, cruelties, imperfections, oddities and so on, on the face of it does not look like the one created by an omnipotent, omniscient and a kindly God. Every religion believes that its scriptures expound infallible truths and gives infallible guidance because they are the work of the God himself. Naturally the scriptures also are believed to be perfect in every way. But this does not appear to be the case. Although God created the world and the very God is believed to be the author of the scriptures, it is curious that no scripture mentions the existence of America or Australia. In every scripture we will find only incomplete geography, feudal type of social structure, queer theories of creation, no guidance for the burning problems of modern society, discrimination against women, praise of warfare and so on. If we are to judge the author from the scriptures we will not find their author the God perfect in any way. It is again inexplicable as to how not only do various scriptures disagree with each other but some of them contain even self-contradictions.

It is quite often argued by the theists that the god had created a fine world but it is the man who has spoiled the whole show. We can ask the theists as to what is the almighty God doing when his show is being spoiled? And again, who is spoiling his show? His very creation: the man,, his best creation. Could not God create man in such a way that he will undo what the God has done? If he could not, is God worth his hollowed description? Moreover, all the evil existing in the world is not man-made.; there is natural evil also, like the floods, droughts, earth quakes and so on. What about them? Various religious communities take inspiration from their respective scriptures and fight fierce battles in the very name of God. And the pious omniscient and the almighty God is doing nothing, not even to clear his own name. Hence we are led to conclude that the God is all along silent because he is not there at all. Continuous increase in crimes and in the number of criminals also speaks more about the absence of God than his presence.

God Realization, Prayers and Miracles

What about people having met God, talked to him, touched him and so on? Even this claim of the theists does not stand scrutiny. Only the believers in personal God had god-meeting experiences and not the others like the Muslims, Jains, mystics, and the atheists and like. Even those who claim to have met God have seen (?) in fact a figure of their own peculiar devotion; there is no unanimity in the descriptions of the god meeting experiences. These God-meeting experiences lack having any objective content, because only the so-called seers saw the god and not the others who were just around. Moreover such experiences are increasingly getting rare. Not even one percent. People have that experience so much so that it clearly falls under the category of hallucination. It is again puzzling as to why the so-called seers met the God although they had no special merit for this. It is again disappointing to note that the so-called seers hardly did anything astounding for the benefit of the society after their meeting the God. One structural type of difficulty also arises as regards the god meeting experience, i.e. since the god is by definition omnipresent and since the devotee is only part of god, how can a part see face to face the whole of which it itself is a part? This is just not

possible. Similarly, it is past understanding as to how is a spiritual God is seen through physiological sense organs. All in all God meeting is not at all a convincing proof of God's existence.

People are now coming realize the truth of the rationalist claim that the prayers are never answered by the God (because he is not there) and the miracles, the so-called ultimate weapon in the armoury of theists are all fake. The ancient ignorant and helpless people could only prey to the invisible deities. But when the prayers did not fetch the expected fruits the failure was attributed to some likely deficiency in the prayer. The modern theists have found some things more to fall back upon. Men, critically ill, not only prey to the God for recovery but they also take necessary medicines and the other necessary care. Now these other factors sometimes click but the credit of the recovery is clearly allocated by the believers to the efficacy of the prayers. But the number of people who are seeing the cleverness of the game is increasing. I do not know why the believers in the efficacy of prayer (to God) do not restrict themselves to only prayer and not do anything else at all?

The theists take help of miracles to prove the existence of God. But the rationalists are continuously exposing the fake nature of the miracles and are thus taking away an important prop of the God.

The challenge to the rationalist was whether he could disprove the existence of God. The rationalist's answer to this challenge was two fold. One to point out that it is primarily the responsibility of the theist to prove that the God exists he cannot shift the burden of proof upon the opponent. Two that the theist claims about God are illogical, unrealistic, sometimes silly and mostly harmful in the present world. It leads to superstitions; queer customs, waste of time and energy and even lead to wars. The God-belief is creating more problems than solving them. Even as an explanation of the world the knot of the God is difficult to untie than the knot of the nature.

Dr. D D Bandiste

Dr. DD Bandiste was born in July 1923, and was educated in various Universities situated in various states in India. After teaching philosophy in various colleges he has retired as Professor of Philosophy in 1981. He is writing constantly in the various rationalist, humanist, and atheist journals. He has written seventeen books from rational point of view. He is a recipient of Rationalist Agarkar award of 2002. He presided over the annual session of the Maharashtra Philosophical Association in 2004.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF RATIONALISM

All human beings are alike. We all have normal biological and psychological needs, experience, emotions like fear, anger, love, jealousy, love etc., have capacity to learn, change, think, take decisions and act and react in a very normal way. But do we really live a normal healthy life? Most of our thinking and behaviour are fraught with superstitious beliefs, blind faith, ignorance, prejudices and unfounded, unreasonable ideas. We have capacity to reason, distinguish and discriminate between right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, just and unjust. Yet we hardly employ our these abilities in our usual daily life. Most of us are not even aware that we live a very irrational life. Hence, this is an attempt to enlighten people about rationalism and recommend to them the Do' and Don'ts of rationalism.

Before I enumerate the Do's and Don'ts of rationalism we should be clear about certain concepts of rationalism. What is rationalism? What are irrational ways of behaviour? Why do some people prefer to think, feel and behave in irrational ways? Why are people are averse to accept and adopt the ways of rationalism? We should also know about their salient features of rationalism and rational approach is good and desirable. From this analysis will emerge automatically the Do's and don'ts of rationalism?

What is Rationalism?

Rationalism is a philosophy. Rationalism is attitude, an approach almost very equivalent to scientific approach. Rationalism is not one more dogma or ism or religion. Rationalism is not a religion in the sense people are classified into Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam or

Christianity etc. Rationalism is man's innate quality common to all. Rationality is cosmic philosophy and here is no alternative to rationalism. Rationalism is an outlook, which is absolutely human, above all religions and secular thinking, philosophy, class, creed, culture, and country or social – political-moral philosophy. To understand what rationalism is and what it is not, we should first have a clear definition of rationalism.

The Oxford dictionary gives meaning of rational as 'able to reason, sensible, sane, not foolish, or absurd or extreme or based on the reasoning, rejecting what is unreasonable or cannot be tested by reasoning in religion and custom'. And it defines rationalism as 'the treating of reason as the ultimate authority in religion the rejection of doctrines not consonant with reason'. Thus the dictionary meaning of reason and rationalism considers reason based on reasoning as the prime element. But if you look into our religious and philosophical treatises like the Upanishads, Darshanams you will find that they are great intellectual discourses based on intelligent thinking and reasoning. But these intellectual treatises though supported by logical arguments, when examined in relation to reality and experience they find little support. Thus mere reasoning or intelligent thinking is not a requisite condition of rationalism. Reasoning should be based on and supported by actual experiences and reality. World Rationalism Movement has given a definition of rationalism which is universally accepted. Rationalism is the mental attitude, which universally accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience (observation and experiment) and independent of all arbitrary assumptions and authority.

Salient Characteristics of Rationalism

We shall try to identify the salient characteristics of rationalism, which would help us in understanding the Do's and don'ts of rationalism and rationalist behaviour.

- Rationalism is a mental attitude, a scientific approach, which leads an individual to think in a particular way about each and every item and event. For example, about himself, about his friends and others, about events occurring around him, about rituals, customs, traditions, about beliefs called superstitions, about God, divinity, worship, prayer etc.
- Rational approach is based on sense experience. The idea, concept, or event howsoever attractive, but not subject to experience or empirical evidence, are not at all acceptable to a rationalist. Howsoever your experience may not be direct, but you can infer from indirect proofs from conclusion to cause.
- Thus rationalism is concerned only with facts, concrete data, not merely imaginary data, which cannot be translated into factual, concrete form.
- However the observation of the rationalist for collection of data is not a one-time experience only. Observation should be repetitive, intense and comprehensive. The rationalist tries to examine from all the sides of the cube. He does not draw conclusions on the basis of casual and accidental experiences, on the basis of one or two elements however attractive they may be. He collects data for as well as against, positive and negative sides. He arrives at the conclusion after weighing all the points with sound and objective reasoning.
- Rationalism as related to concrete facts leads to an important characteristic that in a rationalist thinking there is no place for subjective, personal likes and dislikes prejudices or partiality. Rationalist does not say that 'This is true because I believe in it or I like it'. Objectivity vehemently denies the role of superstitions, blind faith, intuition, inner voice, revelation, divine vision etc. Because these so called experiences are strictly personal beliefs, delusions, illusions or hallucinations and are not subject of verification and reason also.
- A rationalist attitude does not believe or accept a statement because it has been prescribed in a religious scripture like Upanishads, Geeta, Bible, Koran, etc. or it has been said by some Guru, Prophet, Rishi-Muni or religious head etc. Blind faith in and uncritical acceptance is anathema for a rationalist. One does not accept a statement because it has been said by a reverential person like Shankaracharya, Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Albert Einstein, or any religious order. A rationalist will examine such statements critically in light of his experience and knowledge of reality.

- Rationalist does not accept an idea or belief because it is very popular and believed by all or because it is very attractive and prevalent. For example, rationalism does not hold valid the belief and concept of some super entity or God. It rejects outright the beliefs like after death and reincarnation, supernatural and divine causation, miracles, paranormal and supernatural phenomena, astrology, Vaastushastra etc. because such phenomena either have no objective, factual evidences or do not exist hence cannot be verified or examined at all.
- Rationalist approach tries to establish philosophy in search of Truth, which is above subjective morality and not susceptible to forces which are not natural and subject to test and verification.

A rationalist is never an extremist in his views. He always looks all the aspects of an issue and then forms his opinion and even then he is open to correction and prepared to change his views in light of new data. Rationalism is always against dogmatism and fixed ideas. A rationalist has an attitude and courage to differ with the views of howsoever respectable a scripture or book is and howsoever-learned speaker or writer is. This does not mean that the rationalist is an egoist and stands on his pride. On the contrary rationalism makes the individual to be gentle, humble, and sympathetic to all and respect the opinion of others. Rationalism means judicious discrimination i.e. Vivekbuddhi. Hence we can term rationalism as Vivekbuddhivaad.

Basic Assumptions of Rationalism

- Rationalism believes that any event in this universe as a phenomenon of nature and caused by casual forces of nature. There is nothing like supernatural or divine or spiritual.
- Every thing has a cause and nothing comes out of nothing.
- There is uniformity in nature; that is the same cause produces same effect. There are no exceptions in nature. If a particular casual factor produces an effect different from the one expected then it should be examined and you will find there is different cause for this deviating effect.
- This principle of causation leads us to deny anything like miracle. There are no phenomena, which are miracles, or mysterious or divine causation. An event is a mystery or a miracle so far its causal factors are not known. Hence rationalists and scientists emphasize on research and examination. People declare certain phenomena like cure of a patient on death bed escape safely from a fatal accident a sudden gain in money in times of crisis, conception of child when doctors had given up hope etc. as miracles because as a result of their mental lethargy they do not want to take trouble for analysis of the phenomena and find the real reasons behind it. Rationalists and scientists do not treat any phenomena as mystical, supernatural, beyond explanation, revelation etc.
- Rationalists follow a simple method and approach in the investigation, which is called a scientific method. Rationalist philosophy is a synthesis of empiricism, logical positivism, and reasoning. This methodology of scientific investigation is a product of new spirit in 16th century., the age of renaissance in Europe. Hence I want to draw attention to an important point that a rationalist adopting a scientific method is much more than a scientist. History of science shows many famous and renowned scientists under the influence of their family and environment had faith in god, which is not an object of scientific investigation. Hence these scientists though engaged in study of nature were not rationalists. For them the spirit of science witnessed in their scientific research was not translated into other spheres of their life outside the laboratory. All scientists may not be rationalists, but all honest rationalists are scientific in their approach. But remember that the rationalist too is a human being susceptible to all kinds of weaknesses normal to any human being. Hence an individual who declares himself a rationalist may not be able to adopt rationalist attitude sometimes in case of some problems. These are common phenomena and to ignore them also is again a rational attitude.
- The methodology adopted for investigation by a scientist and a rationalist is normally same.

What is and what is not Rationalism?

Rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude admitting that "I may be wrong or you may be right and let us get nearer the truth." It is not an attitude on compromise but a temperament of open-mindedness. It is

temperament of liberalism, prepare to change on reasonable new evidences, Rationalist is not a closed mind, not amenable to new knowledge and data. The rationalist person is one who is genuinely willing to subject his beliefs and assumptions and presuppositions to critical tests. A rationalist would not say that 'I believe because I have faith in it and I am not prepared to give up my (blind) faith'. Or 'I believe In some creator of this vast universe and that is God'. 'I believe that the planets in the sky as laid out in my horoscope do affect my life, because see there is Mars in the horoscope of my daughter and hence she had a late marriage.' 'I believe that my child got cured of his serious sickness as the result of blessings of my Guru and the prasad given by him'. 'I believe prayers and worship do bring us good results'. 'One has to bear the results of his Karmas'. The rationalist does not require believing in supernatural creation, God, prayer, worship, theory of Karma, the good or bad effects of planets, and in astrology or Vaastu etc.

The rationalist is a staunch realist, a very practical man, more concerned with the problems and issues of this world rather than with the supernatural and imaginary fears and rewards. A rationalist is a humanist. He has faith in making sincere efforts for the alleviation of the agonies of the poor rather than sitting idle and seeking the blessings of God or some Sadhu, or wait for a miracle which is not going to happen. Rationalist has compassion for the poor and the deprived and the people in pains. He does not go to the Ashrams of the Babas or to hear the religious discourses or such activities, which have no bearing on human services.

Rationalist wants the people not to be the slave of sentiments, emotions, and impulses. It wants to handle these psychological states wisely, selectively or with balanced mind. There is a common criticism that a rationalist does not and should feel emotions because he is a man of reason only. Now this criticism is not only out of place and wrong but it is the result of misunderstanding about rationalism. On the contrary the rationalist is the most human and compassionate individual. The pains and agonies of the mankind move him. He respects the sentiments of others and therefore he is against the injustice, fraud, and cheating in the name of God, religion and divine power etc. A rationalist is a rebellion against the established conservative, exploitative, decayed system. He wants to awake the people from their sleep of blind faith, ignorance, suggestibility and being impressed by the hypnotic power of the brokers of God and divinity.

Irrational Behaviour

Superstitions, prejudices, beliefs, faith in the efficacy of prayers and worship, belief in the existence of soul and rebirth, belief in soul taking the form of haunting spirit, faith in astrology and Vaastu, belief in supernatural and paranormal, ability to perform miracles and claims of divine, supernatural power, faith in the performance of the rituals and religious ceremonies etc can be cited as examples of irrational behavior. I will try to explain in brief how all these phenomena are irrational and continue to do harm to the society. Superstition is such a belief, which has been formed on the basis of an experience of an accidental event, which has no direct and causal relation. But the accidental experience was so attractive that the individual was impressed to see a causal relation in it. In all the societies, regions and religions, several types of superstitions prevail and unfortunately these superstitious beliefs are many times the driving forces for the individual and social behavior. And such superstitions prevail among all classes of people related with all types of problems like health, sex, marriage, business, examination, job and many others. Now the superstitions and blind faith are completely unfounded beliefs and the epitome of irrational behavior,

Belief in existence of soul apart from the body is prevalent in many religions. The soul is believed to be non-physical. It exists even after death in non-physical form and Hindu religion believes that the soul enters into another body and takes rebirth. There is strong belief also that the soul of the person after his death haunts and many take the form of a spirit and express itself through some other person, called medium. Thus the phenomena called possession, split and dual personality, schizophrenia, hysterical disorders etc are believed as he proof of existence of the soul. But now it has been established that all these phenomena called possession by a spirit are psychological and mental behavioral disorders and can be treated by the medical branch called psychiatry.

Astrology is the so-called science of influence of the planets on human individual behavior and on the events of the world. Astrology and along with it the Vaastu are nothing more than an anthology

of accidental and imaginary associations of the planets with our life. The planets, as the part of the solar system, behave as per the laws of nature as discovered by Astronomy. How and why of the planets, the inanimate mass and matter should have any concern with a tiny human being living on the planet of Earth thousands of kilometers away from them? The statements and conclusions of astrology and Vaastu are nothing more than a bunch of superstitions.

The experiences as termed as the vision by the devotees of god, great spiritual and religious saints, the abilities called clairvoyance, psycho-kinesis, telepathy, precognition etc have been proved as the expression of delusion, illusion or hallucinations of the person concerned. The experiences of having supernatural powers, an ability to perform miracles, the paranormal abilities etc on examination have been proved as deliberate cheating or the ability to perform magical tricks and nothing more than that.

Here I have discussed a few illustrations of irrational behaviors just to show that we generally have no tendency and desire to question and go into the depth of the phenomena and examine them. This is not only irrationalism but also a mental lethargy and inertia which in the long run are not for the good of any society. And hence we preach and propagate rationalism.

Do's and Don'ts of Rationalism

All these and many such other phenomena have been often put to scientific tests and verification and none of these phenomena have been found having factual basis and objective reality. And it is an irony of human intelligence and gullibility of human nature that in spite of the efforts of rationalist movement a large number of people still continue to have faith and believe in them. Not only that this irrationalism is passed on as a heritage to the next generation in the family and society by the parents. And thus the heritage of irrationalism and ignorance continues from generation to generation.

If you have read this article carefully, you yourself will be able to identify and enumerate the Do's and Don'ts of rationalism. However I put down a few very important points:

- Do not accept any idea on its face. It is possible that what you see or hear may be illusory. Hence always keep your eyes and ears open.
- Always look upon a phenomena with spirit of doubt and find the truth.
- Cultivate the spirit of inquiry.
- Respect the disagreement with your views and be open-minded and open for correction.
- Do not be dogmatic and possessive of your ideas.
- Be positive.
- Be a realist. Talk only on concrete things and do not play with imaginary concepts and hollow meaningless words, which you cannot substantiate with concrete evidences.
- Do not be selfish, self-centered and subjective and fall in love with your own ideas.
- Give respect to your opposite views also.
- Be human and adopt humanitarian attitude.
- Do not pay attention to person's religion, caste, gender, wealth, status, learning etc while judging his/her opinion and worthiness.
- An honest and good rationalist is an honest and a good human being.
- The true rationalist cannot be immoral, an imposter or fraud.
- One can be moral and rational without belief in religion and god.
- Respect nature. Nature is an open book. Study it. Discover it.
- Every problem or event is a phenomenon of nature and you will find its solution in the circumspection of nature.
- There is nothing supernatural beyond nature.
- Encourage and practice the values of individual freedom, equality, liberalism, honesty of purpose, secularism, compassion for the deprived, revolution against fraud and cheating etc.

The progress of the world so far has been only through the royal road of science. And the road to success and progress in future also passes through scientific approach, rationalism and humanism.

Dr. B A Parikh

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ATHEISM AS A WAY OF LIFE

Theism and atheism are two ways of life. Whatever may be the name of religion, it is god-centred and believes in the so-called supernatural power. On the other hand atheism is human-centred. Atheism is free from god and religion. It is scientific, humanistic and strives for all round development of the individual. The theistic way of life is not able to solve the life's problems. It turns the attention of the people from this world to the imaginary world. It promises salvation after death. The world's problems are relegated into the background.

The revolutions in religion, struggles for social reform, the yawning for social justice and the efforts for building secular India produced a rich harvest of social change workers who acted as harbingers of change. Thus every social reform was a step further in liberalizing society and in strengthening atheism and humanism. They tried to rejuvenate the society with fresh ideas and progressive thought and action.

In 20th century Periyar Ramswami, M N Roy, and A T Kovoov proposed atheism and humanism. Gora and Saraswati Gora founded the world's first known Atheist Centre in 1940 and also organised World Atheist Conferences. Gora and Saraswati Gora championed atheist as a positive way of life. In India we find the conflict has been between religion and social reform. In our country, the rigid social structure leads to structural violence. Religion opposes deviation from its prescribed path. Miracle mind is a bane of progress.

Lopsided Social values

It is distressing to note that in the name of religion and customs, many heinous practices were perpetuated in the society. The position of women was degraded. She was confined to the four walls of the house. She was deprived of the much-needed social status. Women were considered inferior and even her birth was unwelcome in some families. It shows the lopsidedness of social values. Unless the status of the women is improved in the family and in the society, many of the social evils cannot be tackled that easily.

The dowry and many other social evils keep women down. The unwed motherhood is supposed to be a stigma where as the man goes scot-free. Instead of double standards there should be a new way of life, in which women and men get equal status and respect. Equality demands that not only women should have the opportunity for education, but also equality of status in social and economic relations. Take the case of family planning. It is the religious belief that is standing in the way of adopting the small family norm. Some believe that children are god's gift and some others feel that their religion will not permit them to follow family planning.

Atheist way of life stresses on new approach towards upbringing of children. Instead of filling the minds of the young with the fairy tales of gods and ghosts, it imparts liberal and secular education. It promotes rational and scientific outlook. What we need today is not mere separation of religion from the political field, but also separation of religion and education, separation of culture and religion and cleanse of language from the theistic vocabulary. Religion must be a personal matter and public domain must be from religion. We need economic secularism.

Atheist and humanist values need to be inculcated in the minds of the people. New situations require new solutions in a secular way. It is the duty of all progressive minded people and the secularists to make a common cause to strengthen the secular ramparts we guard. They should also make education secular.

Freedom of the Individual

Gora clearly stated that the essence of atheism is freedom of the individual. Freedom releases the immense potentialities of human imagination, initiative and effort that lay suppressed under theistic faith. Free individuals feel masters of situations. The mood of supplication and complaint, inherent in prayer to god and petitions to government, has no place in the atheistic way of life. Atheists always assert; they never surrender. They take no failure, everything as an experience that improves the method for further attempts.

Atheists too have their faiths, fancies and ideals. But their scientific outlook distinguishes between faith and truth. Accordingly, the purpose of life changes. It is not the fanciful salvation after death, but happens here and now. Atheists face facts without fear. "What is to be done?" concerns them more than "Why it is so?"

Theists also talk of one humanity. But they cannot promote equality since they do not recognise freedom of individual. The recognition of the freedom marks the difference between theism and atheism. While the individual is the basis of all civilisations, he or she fashions aids and systems to facilitate ease and association. The best aid in modern times is the institution of a government. Therefore atheists are political. They control the government and strive to bend it to serve their wants., instead of allowing it to exercise authority over them. Indeed, people are masters and governments are servants.

Caste System and Religion

We need a new outlook and approach to tackle the present day problems. Religion is losing its hold on human affairs and it is being irrelevant. Hence, religion is turning into religious fanaticism. It is said that religions preach peace, but now they fell prey to fundamentalist and religious fanatics. In the name of propagation of religion, business magnets entered the fray and they are controlling and enjoying all the resources. They are forced to believe that they achieve their salvation through prayer and obedience to god. With the result the questioning spirit is not developing and they are not challenging the oppressive and outmoded beliefs and customs. Propagation of atheism necessitates building of alternatives to religion.

With the untiring efforts of social reformers, the fight against caste and untouchability has begun in the modern period. Every social reformer is a rebel in his own period. He or she challenged old and heinous customs and tried to make the world a better place to live in.

The caste bonds are loosened in the modern India. But casteism is increasing. Casteism is eating the vitals of the nation. Caste consciousness is growing. With good intentions, the caste based reservations for the backward were introduced in the Indian Constitution. But half a century of experience had shown that caste based reservations led to the development of vested interests to promote casteism and also thwarting the march towards reducing the caste consciousness.

Gora always made it a principle to organise the inter-dining, inter-caste marriages and other programmes for social equality in the glaring sun of openness. He was firm on his principles and was uncompromising in his opposition to the practice of untouchability and caste system. But he was polite all the time. He set the example before others. Hundreds of inter-caste, casteless and inter-religious marriages have been celebrated in Andhra Pradesh under the influence of Atheist Centre. The Atheist Centre made special efforts to educate them about the necessity of castelessness. It encouraged mixed housing without reference to caste and religion. It is very difficult to promote marriages between two sects among the so called untouchables. However Atheist Centre could perform even such marriages. Atheist Centre encouraged registration of marriages under Special Marriage Act. Eradication of untouchability is intricately interconnected with the issue of human rights, human dignity, economic betterment and social justice.

Hence castelessness is the only answer. Inter-caste marriages, casteless marriages and inter-religious marriages pave the way for national integration. Separation of politics from religion is no longer a mere cherished idea, but of a great practical necessity. The fusion of politics and religion is detrimental to human progress.

Good Society

“Be bold and be human” – it is the only solution. As Gora stated that theism only created some good individuals but not a good society. The march towards a post-religious society is a must. The pace will be accelerated when a movement is adopted. It is the common cause that unites the people. The difference between theism and atheism is the difference between faith and truth. Religious understanding stops with faith. Science proceeds to truths through verification. Religion turns into superstition when it clings to falsehoods with fanatical faith. Faith closes the mind; science opens it. Freedom is the opposite of the slave-mind and so it is the essence of atheism. In positive terms, atheism represents the feeling of freedom and truthfulness.

Gora reiterated that the rise of freedom does not stop with fighting faith in the existence of god. It fights every curb on the expression of freedom and truthfulness. In the modern age it fights political dictatorship, economic capitalism, social traditionalism, philosophical determinism, and forms of centralization, which belittle the individuals.

The aim of religious social work is peace and tranquillity after death. They talk about post life situations. We want peace on earth – in this life, and not in the imaginary afterlife. What we need today is secular social work. In this age of mass communication, it is the example that inspires others. Let us strive to do away with the stronghold of religion. When religious influence is lessened, the people of Asia – and in particular South Asia – harness human power and human energies for creative and constructive purposes.

Collective Efforts

Each individual is unique. But the beauty lies in the collective effort to achieve the cherished ideals. Atheism recognises the freedom of the individual and it also equally harps on the collective effort for well – being. Freedom and responsibility go together. In the earlier ages the few people had to struggle hard to achieve even a little. In this democratic age, if many people strive even a little, great changes can be achieved. We have to strengthen the secular outlook in this country and we have to follow the atheist and humanist principles and be active.

Mrs Saraswati Gora highlighted the significance of atheist way of life. She said “We have to build an alternate way of life, free from religion and superstition. In this endeavour, the role of both men and women is of equal importance. The distinctions of caste and religion must go. No problem is insurmountable. We should have immense faith in the innate abilities of the common people. Hence justice, equality, fraternity, attain greater significance. They are not mere high ideals to be cherished, but to be practised to build the society free of exploitation and injustice”.

Atheism is thus not a mere philosophical discussion. Atheism is a positive way of life. Atheism is full of life. Atheism is not for hermits and those who renounce the world like the sanyasis and observe celibacy. It is for common people who live in families and who face all the vicissitudes of life. It is easy for a bachelor who has no family to do greater sacrifice. But the ideal person for the ordinary individual is a family man and how he behaves with others in day to day life. In other words, atheism aims at social reforms and it strengthens family bonds, filial affection, and it enhances the dignity of individual.

In society we have many problems. Whether they are theists or atheists, the social problems remain same. But as to how do we tackle them is of paramount importance. It is not the fate that determines the future of a person or the hardships. It is the social condition that causes the hardships. Hence, people should develop scientific outlook and scientific temper to understand the social realities. But mere description is no solution. When time comes, people should stand up and live up their cherished goals. Social reform is an effort to bring change in human relations. The Atheist Centre is actually developing numerous secular type social activities and reforms. But surely for any social institution to come to stay requires sustained efforts of a large number of people.

Oppose Slave-Mind

As religion promotes a slave mind and submission, the desired change could not be achieved. Hence open advocacy of atheism is a must. Without fear or favour, people should declare themselves as atheists. Atheists take responsibility on themselves and try to change the world they live in. Atheism is a moral and psychological revolution.

When we look back in the history, it provides innumerate examples that atheists were known for their moral steadfastness and commitment to the cause they championed. In religious way of life, the attention is divided between god and the social relations. People blame their fate, their stars, and their actions in the previous births for the predicament to which they are subjected here and now. They shift the blame on others, curse their fate and spend their time in prayer. But atheists asserts themselves. They take the blame on themselves and try to change the system. We have to change the system by convincing others. Atheism is bringing change in common people regarding their approach towards life.

When we take atheism as a way of life it requires corresponding changes in outlook and actions. For centuries, religion reined supreme in all aspects of human life with do's and don'ts. How we bring up our children in a secular way is of greater importance. Our educational system indoctrinates children and adults with the theistic beliefs.

Every aspect of life needs scrutiny. Children should be given secular names. Secular festivals must be observed. Atheists are full of life and happiness. Dance, drama, music, sculpture, literature and all forms of fine arts must reflect a new secular approach. Language and customs and traditions must have secular moorings. It is high time that the education system is revamped to suit to the needs of the present day secular society. Education must be creative and challenging and it should bring to the fore the creative talents of the people.

Social Responsibility

To do good or to be good, the prop of god and religion are not necessary. To help fellow human being is social responsibility. Hence, we have to emphasize on secular social work, which rises above all sectarian considerations. Secular social work concentrates on empowering the people and to improve their status to become equal partners in progress.

The whole world is slowly but steadily moving towards a post religious society. We cannot expect that religion will wither away immediately. But when the secular alternatives develop people automatically tend to move away from religion in all aspects of life. Hence, building secular alternatives in every sphere of life is very essential. Economic equality is an integral part of atheism. It is the master key to social action. But the efforts for economic equality must be democratic and through persuasion. We have seen the examples of many earlier efforts where forced change did not yield the desired results.

Atheism is democratic in its approach and egalitarian in its principles. In democracy the process may be slow, but the changes that takes place has greater impact on the minds of he people. In the modern world, democracy with all its imperfections is the only available alternative for change. In other words, social change would come only through peaceful means and it will sustain very long. The other name for democracy is persuasion. It is not coercion, but convincing others that makes all the difference. The responsibility of the citizens does not end with mere casting of the votes. There must be constant effort to educate and empower the citizens. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. As Gora rightly pointed that democracy requires atheistic correction. In democracy people should be active in all aspects of life.

As Gora reiterated "No single book can guide anyone through out the life as none is wholly similar to another in talent, taste or situation. The only book from which everyone can learn always is the book of life wherein every person is a page and every work is word". In each generation the life of the people must be guided according to their requirements. The old customs and traditions must yield place to the new. The aim of the social progress is to march toward equality in every sphere of life. Atheism and peace go together. The future of humanity is intertwined with peace within the nations and in the international arena. The day is not far off when the nation states loose their credence ans as international understanding grows, people look back beyond their boundaries and render a helping hand to improve the condition of the disadvantaged all over the world.

Atheism is based upon self-respect, human dignity and equality. Atheism is concerned with the condition of the fellow humans. Atheism is bound to grow. It is global force. The slogan of atheism is Jai Insan (Victory to Human).

As Gora pointed out "The atheistic way of life is full of initiatives. It continually progresses towards increasing happiness every time through scientific understanding and technological control of the forces of the world. Its objective is equality; its method is openness; its means is political action; its driving force is the moral freedom of the individual.

Dr G Vijayam

Dr G Vijayam is Executive Director of Atheist Centre, Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. Gora and Saraswati Gora founded The Centre in 1940. Vijayam has been actively associated with the activities of atheism, humanism, rationalism and social change programmes. He is editor of Atheist, English Monthly published from Atheist Centre, since 1969.

RATIONALISM: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

In the 21st century the challenges, facing rationalist movement and us are manifold. On one hand we have the classic irrational witch doctor type fellow with his usual mumbo jumbo, the tricks, sleigh of hand et al. On the other hand we have the sophisticated urban pseudo with the new age jargon of spiritualism, alternative medicine, Vaastu and what not. We have also the political parties with pseudo philosophies misleading irrational ideologies surviving by creating all sorts of fears, which have no rational basis. The same seems to have spread to every field of life including medicine and the social science.

To counter it is very essential for the rationalist to be well informed, develop a good intellect and bravely face the challenges. The voice of reason should be heard loud and clear without which there shall be a serious retardation of progress both material and intellectual. With this in mind, the challenges of the future have to be met head on and accepted. The rationalist movement cannot and should not run away from the challenges as and when they come up.

The classical picture of the battle between reason and unreason is the conflict between a college educated, modern minded young man fresh from the university clashing with a weirdly dressed witch doctor when he returns to his village after his education or for a vacation! Naturally, the forces of sciences win and the happy ending brings tears to the eyes of all!! The older picture of irrationalism are the Satya Narayan Rajus alias Satya Saibaba waving their hands in the air and producing what have you to the delight of their rapt audiences who dive at the feet and worship their idol. We also have the Ammas and Babas and many other of their ilk performing sundry miracles and netting their share of gullible followers. The village folk is fleeced by the astrologers. The miracle performing witch doctors are also part of this scene.

Through years of our campaign we have managed to some extent make breach in their fortresses. The exposure of such people had taken place in thousands of our miracle exposure campaigns and the activists that we have churned out. That some of these activists have reduced themselves to the roadside magicians is another matter, but a dent has been made at least to a small extent and people are conscious of such happenings. Such evils have been recognised by even the most hardboiled of the fundamentalists who agree that such people have to be exposed, particularly the evil looking village tantrik.

But have we managed to end the irrationalism inherent in the people steeped with superstitions of centuries? Have we made the people more aware of scientific analysis of things before accepting them? The question is rather an open one. It is for us to see the future challenges in the very broad perspective in terms of challenges for the next two decades, if not for a longer while. These problems have to be addressed before they overwhelm the structure of the whole society and drive us to a more primitive age.

Political Challenges

While the constitution of India mentions that we are a secular state, the word is more of an anachronism. Our definition of secularism seems to be not dissociation of state from religion., but equal "respect" to all of them the existing and new one s that may come into being. The resources of the state are used carelessly in promoting religious activities of various types. On the one hand we

spend huge amount for the Kumbh Melas of Hindus and on Haaj Yatras of the Muslims. In order not to leave out others we waste public funds to sponsor activities of the others too! The state sponsored religious invocations

Even at totally secular venues and functions. If not with any specific religious prayers, invocations to a so-called universal 'god' are made!

The state also supports many godmen and women by helping them in starting things from centres of learning to hospitals! We have the examples of Satya Sai institutes of higher learning and the Amrita deemed universities where commercialised activities masquerade all social services. The political parties dare not take on any of these godmen due to vote bank politics and the problems with their own members who may be their devotees. The same is also applicable to the sponsorship of religion-dominated activities like yatra and pilgrimages etc.

So, it is upto the rationalist movement to take up these challenges and to see that a due process exists for secular discourse. In the absence of this the scenario will be dominated by the irrational ideologies.

Social Challenges

Secularism experienced in the constitution is more observed in breach rather than practice. A secular state should have no discrimination of any sort but is it so in India is the question. All sorts of discrimination are found here. The caste system is the biggest curse on the population. The caste, wealth, gender and many types of inequalities have resulted in the exploitation of the people from thousands of years. In our system caste decides what you eat, how you dress and where you live. This system also decides as to who are your friends and enemies also. In this context, gender discrimination is also very rampant. The very male-female ratio in some of the states has come down to alarming level. The discrimination has resulted in female foeticide and the gender ratio is one of worst in the world. This irrational discrimination is spread even at level of entry into places of worship and the appointment of preachers.

Untouchability, though is a crime, cognisable and non-bailable carrying severe penalties is still going on strong in some of the rural areas. The scheduled caste and tribes are exploited wholesale to get cheap labour, fulfil superstitious beliefs and sometimes even sexual desires of the upper castes. Despite of all the efforts made by successive governments we have to do a lot in this area. In social fields, a newfound concept or rather the arrival of age-old practice of so-called spiritualism is gaining ground! Due to its clever group of manipulators, this word has become holy cow. This is one of the greatest challenges facing us today. In the past decade, dozens of those so-called spiritualists have taken over a large segment of our social life. Each one of them claims to have millions of followers and puts forward claim of having accomplished wonders. Their influence on social life is totally disproportionate to their knowledge and following. They enforce age-old philosophies and obscurant practices in the name of spiritualism. They put forward outlandish claims to support their contention, which are almost never questioned.

Science and Pseudo-Science

While science demands documentation, experimentation and evidence, pseudo-science is the opposite. In the recent past and in the foreseeable future, our movement has the onerous task of taking on pseudo-science. This is because of the support given to the promotion of these pseudo-sciences from the highest levels of politicians and the bureaucrats makes them very powerful and the lower level does not oppose them.

This sort of support has created in the constitutional authorities in every field who dare to turn down or modify decisions taken by competent technologists or scientists. The fields of Vaastu, numerology, and astrology are some known examples. Vaastu is a typical example of pseudo-science. Putting forward vague reasons of wind blowing from peculiar direction and the etc. The so-called Vaastu experts overrule the decisions and designs of qualified, trained engineers. Many times gullible people accept the suggestions of these so-called experts and later on get into trouble. Feng Shui is Chinese variant of this very name quackery. Similarly numerologists, astrologers and quacks of every description poke their noses into the daily affairs of superstitious people.

Quackery in the field of medicine is another area in which irrationalism makes inroads. On one hand we have the irrational theories the so-called systems of medicine. On the other hand we have huge claims of people with so-called spiritual powers. The end result of both may be the death of the patient!

Some systems of medicine themselves have no rational scientific basis. For example, we have system like homeopathy and ayurveda. In homeopathy it is claimed that like cure like and in system like ayurveda the body is claimed to be made of five elements and three faults! Any way, since these have existed for long they may be tolerated, if not accepted. But on the other so-called systems of medicine of the totally irrational nature needs to be exposed. These are like Reikei, magneto therapy, colour therapy aromatherapy, music therapy etc. Though the Supreme court has held about fourteen of these therapies have no scientific basis whatsoever, they still flourish due to the support of the so-called elite of the society. In some cases religion and the associated superstitions play the major role. In so-called prayer meetings of the Christians many diseases are said to be cured. Among Hindus, vows and sacrifices are supposed to cure! The same is also applicable to Muslims, only difference being that the objects are different.

How Shall We Tackle These?

It is for our movement to develop strong base among the people. We have to relentlessly attack all these irrational beliefs and therapies at various levels. Our plan of action should be on the following lines:

- Develop a strong database. That should be in our minds as well as in the literature, which we should acquire, read and store. We should have a directory of superstitions, irrational practices and whenever such things come to our notice we should be able to expose it.
- Share the knowledge. Whenever irrational occurrences come to our notice we should inform the public about the past recessions on which such events have occurred and explain the previous experience.
- Investigate the phenomena. Whenever such phenomena occur we have to make it our duty to go to the place where it occurs and investigate it.
- Do not hesitate to challenge the claimants. If anyone claims to have paranormal power we should challenge him or her to demonstrate these under fraud-proof conditions. The already existing challenges of the leaders of our movements should also be referred to.
- Build up the support base. We have to remember that there are lot of people with views similar to ours. By organising them we can build support base.
- Organise ourselves. While the purveyors of superstitions and the claimants of the paranormal power see to it that a number of organisations come to their support whereas we make no such effort. So we should strengthen ourselves by building our own organisations and approaching sister organisations.
- Use the media. Media is always hungry for news. If we do something which some claim to be due to divine powers, media will give us wide publicity. By having our own group of supporters in the media we can build up our movement.
- React fast. We should not take too much time to react. By the time we react, the purveyor of the superstition may grow too strong. So at the earliest opportunity we must launch our attack and make the people see through the hoax.
- Set an example. There is no point in our movement unless we show by example. We should lead a very rational life so that one can see that it is possible to lead an irrationality-free life.
- Do get involved. We have seen many rational-minded people with good knowledge leading a model life, But they do not want to get involved as they think it will take too much of their time and efforts. We should give up this lethargy and get involved for the sake of our future as well as that of humanity as a whole.

Dr. Narendra Nayak

Dr. Narendra Nayak is a professor in the prestigious Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, Mangalore. Apart from hundreds of miracle exposure programmes performed all over the country, he is a prolific writer and a bold activist. He is also a very good orator. He has conducted a large number of workshops and training camps where thousands of activists have been trained.

SPIRITUALISM AND THE SPIRITUALISTS: A CRITIQUE BY A LAYMAN

As spiritualism is faith based I choose calling it 'faithism' and rationalism as 'reasonism' as it is reason oriented. I will use these terms henceforth. What is faithism? Beliefs are based on faith. And what is faith? Faith is invariably a blind belief as propounded by the ardent faithists like Sonopant Dandekar, famous astrologer D K Soman and A D Athavale. It is noteworthy that many faithists DO NOT know this! The blindness of faith can also be seen from the faithists' sermons and articles replete with numerous theorems not one of which has a tenable proof. And yet, they expect the readers/listeners not only to believe them but also follow in their footpath! It is painful to note that the masses act up to this too! Faithism is thus fake, an utter falsehood and attempted persistently to be brought home for the masses at large. One of my friends, a co-thinker, Nariman Joshi, says, "Spiritualism is bogus!" Faithist literature nowhere defines terms like god and soul; it cannot tell what they are; and yet makes umpteen descriptions like god is friend, omnipotent, omniscient and the soul is immortal, unbreakable and the like! Quite a number of incidents occur disproving god's qualities mentioned above! Similarly soul's qualities are unverifiable and have yet to be given credence too! The word 'Atma' is actually, a first person singular form of the word "Atman" which means 'self'. Self does denote body which has however a contemptuous mention in Adhyatmic literature! How preposterous! All literature of spiritualism is thus sans any real meaning that would take us to truth! It is full of verbosity that leads a reasonist NOWHERE! As rightly stated by a reasonist thinker, the metaphysical thoughts are meaningless; and hence their veracity or falsehood cannot be examined. Faithism is the serious threat to the truth, morality and progress of humanity all over the world. Faithist thoughts have been challenged by the age-old Rishis and Munis too; but they still command human mind for the obvious reason that incredibly large amounts of capital move about for protecting its vested interests. This capital refuses support to reasonist thoughts, which thwart its economic prowess!

Let me now turn to faithists. I spoke and wrote to a large number of them, only to get evasive and unsatisfactory replies, sometimes even humorous! If I quote all of them, I am afraid, my article may occupy the whole or at least a major portion of the magazine, leaving a very little space to other authors! I will therefore restrain myself mentioning a few only as specimens of faithists absurdities. One more thing I would clarify is that whenever I discuss with someone my aim is never to see the other fellow defeated and myself triumphant! It is rather a 'search for truth'. Here are a few examples of my questions to faithists and their funny answers to me.

- Dr. D K Karve of last generation stated that every act needs time. God is beyond time. Every act needs movement. As god is all occupying his movement is not possible. What is then the meaning of god's act? I put this question to one of my faithist friends; he said, "Dr Karve is a fool who views Adhyatma prejudicially!"
- I read in a book "Faith begins where reason ends" Perplexed I put this statement before my another faithist friend:
 "Is this statement true?"
 "Yes"
 "This means that reason and faith are two distinct things, right?"
 "Yes"
 "And faith is reasonless! OK!"
 My friend was hesitant to say yes to this! Then he said
 "Accepting your statement for a while, what further have you to say?"
 "If faith is reasonless what is the meaning of reasoned faith?"

He had no reply! Yet he said with a little ire “The original statement from which the final statement is deduced must have been made by a person whose brain was rotten and useless!” He thought, the original statement – faith begins where reason ends – was mine; and hence those nasty, irate remarks. When I told him calmly that Swami Vivekananda made the original statement, he was almost lock jawed! For, he had offended a great man of world fame! Then he said:

“Original statement must be correct because it was Vivekananda’s; but your interpretation and deductions there-from must be wrong!”. My question ‘how’ remained unanswered by him till date!

- Shri Vidyanand (Pandey!) the chief of Pawas Peeth in Maharashtra said in his formal talk in Bhusawal,
 “All reasonists are talentless” I asked him
 “Tarkateerth Laxmanshastri Joshi calls himself a reasonist. Should we, commoners, call him talentless?”
 “Don’t talk about Joshi at all! You will not find a single man as ‘liar’ as he!”
 “This is not a reply to my question! You have accused him of one more charge instead! I have read his literature; and found no lie anywhere. If you can quote one, I will withdraw my statement”.
 His white face turned red and his voice became more raised! With folded hands I told him I did not desire to discuss any more. On the same day evening, this gentleman – a misnomer actually – criticised me very severely, in my absence, in his sermon in Vitthal Temple. I came to know of this from my friend who had heard him.
- Adhyatma begins where science ends is a pet philosophy of faithists and Gurus too. I asked one such Guru “Can you tell where science ends?” What on earth could he say? After a long pause, he said “A patient goes to a doctor for treatment. He doesn’t get the result for many days. The doctor tells him that his remedies are over; and that he could try something like religious or Adhyatmik remedies. Isn’t this end of science and the beginning of Adhyatma?” His face glowed with joy! Without disturbing his joy I said, “Please wait a while. Science did not end here; it is the particular doctor’s knowledge of medical science that ended in this case!” He was taken aback and was speechless. This needs no comment except that it is very common that of the faithists to make pointless allegations flamboyantly and claim triumph! Moreover as the scientific knowledge will increase in future, the living ground for Faithism will be continuously decreasing. Spiritualism thrives upon the ignorance of human beings.
- If god is omniscient why is he required to test a devotee to see if his devotion is real or fake? A yet another question put by me to a faithist: “That is God’s LEELA” was the reply. “But if God is kind, why is his test sometimes merciless too?”. “You will not understand it” was the reply! Does it not indicate faithist’s arrogant inability to reply?
- Dhunda Maharaj Deglurkar was a great faithist authority in Maharashtra. He once said ‘Students of Geeta and Dnyaneshwari should explain to people how the problems that face the world find panaceas in these two great books’. I wrote to him requesting to quote couple of verses of this kind. After two reminders his brother replied me stating that if I read these two books carefully I would myself find the answers. I wrote back stating my question was after doing this already. So he should comply with my request. Again after a reminder, he gave me a funny reply stating, “What Maharaj said was not to be taken literally! What he meant was: by studying these two books conflicts in the society could be avoided”. I came to know for the first time that even men of religion/Adhyatma like political leaders change their versions because what Maharaj had said earlier was quite different from what he stated later! Unwittingly enough for him, his statement was not invulnerable! I wrote back to him, “Arjun in Geeta was unwilling to fight; but after Krishna’s 18 chapters long discourses Arjun showed readiness to fight! Is Geeta’s philosophy one that helped occurrence of fight or avoid it?” Two reminders brought no reply.
- Shri D K Kelkar was a staunch reasonist of the past generation. In one of his books he put the following question: If God is omnipotent why does he allow irreligion to occur at all and then incarnate himself to re-establish religion? When I put this question to one of faithist friends, he

said, “You will not understand it. Your talent falls short of it”. I sometimes feel that these faithists are a living paradigm of a verse in Kenopanishad: One who says, he does not know, knows it; one who says, he knows, does not know! They never realise that they make of them a laughing stock by such replies! And yet Maharajas, Ammas, Babas, Gurus and their credulous followers is increasing by leaps and bounds! This is damnable insanity, which even the so-called secular government cannot call a halt to! Those who try to do that have to face manhandling, criticism, boycott and what not.

- Faithists claim to know the “Ultimate truth”; but are not able to tell what that ultimate truth is! They do not know obviously that the real ultimate truth is that there is nothing like ultimate truth in this world! Scientists and reasonists alone know this by dint of which they never make such unwise claims.
- Faithist bank a lot on Swami Vivekananda as a supporter of faith, not knowing what he has stated about reason and religion. He has said, Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason through which every other science justifies itself? This must be so; and the sooner it is done, the better. If religion is destroyed by such investigations it was useless, unworthy superstition. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that should happen. When will this wisdom rise on faithists’ horizon? Perhaps never, for they are diehard dogmatic, who according to one thinker thwart progress and civilisation too!
- All prayer places like temples, mosques, churches etc are built and maintained mainly with the help of black money. And yet no faithist talks about this! He still visits them for begging money, health, prosperity and what not. Whether he gets all the begged things or not, is not to be questioned! If he does not get all that he asks for, he blames his fate as if fate is greater than God!
- A faithist once said to me, “Scientists investigate only the visible world; they cannot do so in regard to invisible things.” I replied, “Haven’t they investigated invisible things like air, cold, heat, energy, mind and the like?” He had no answer. Yet he argued, “Why don’t they investigate God and soul as faithists do?” I said, “Scientists investigate existing things and not imaginary ones. And can you tell me what the results of faithists’ investigations are even after their ceaseless efforts for ages? What proofs do they proffer for their findings, which are inconsistently variegated too? One says God and soul are beyond talent while the other says they can be seen or experienced. Your assumption that faithists are superior to scientists is also untrue.” “You will not understand these subtle things with your small talent” was his reply. He continued, “Secondly I can earn money, livelihood, good name and so on. Can you achieve this feat with your reasonist thoughts?” “I accept my defeat”, I said, “because I hate living in fools paradise!” What else could I do?
- While some faithists say that soul is beyond senses, others also state rhapsodically that soul is self-comprehensible! What a miserable self-contradiction! This only means, if at all it does, that soul is non-existent. Existing things can be described precisely. About non-existing things, anything can be said, even unrestrainedly and attempted to be made credible. How alarming and yet goes on and on for long spans of time!
After a long discussion with the faithists about God, one of them said with a wry face, “God is not a subject for discussions. It is rather a matter of experience.”
“If so, you vainly spent hours in discussing the topic with me! Secondly, have you had any such experience?”
“No”
“If you don’t have this experience, how you came to know that it is a matter of experience?”
“The saints tell us”
“This means you go by others’ experience without having one of your own. In your earlier statement, you had denied going by others’ experiences. How do you explain this aberration?”
“Saints are exception to my earlier statement.”
‘How and why’ have yet remained unanswered by the faithists. Making baseless, wild statements seems to be an abominable trait of faithists!

- In a book on Yogasadhana by Patanjali, I came across two statements:
The body and mind of a person who does Yogasadhana are EASE
Yogasadhana cannot be done unless body and mind are at EASE.
A real case of Catch 22! I put the obvious contradiction in these two statements before a staunch faithist. Angriily he said, "There is no contradiction here. Who feels so are fools!"
- One of my faithist friends came to me to tell some urgent matter.
"I think the aim of science and Adhyatma are same, viz, to uncover the mysteries of this vast universe and reach the final truth"
"Can you tell me which mystery of the universe has been revealed by Adhyatma?" He could not tell!
"Why do you and persons of your ilk make such wild claims at all? Isn't such a claim stupid?"
"I'll think about this again and let you know later"
No need to mention that 'later' has not yet dawned!
One may infer from all this that no faithist has a sensible reply to any of the reasonists' questions. And yet they proudly profess to be knowledgeable and claim that the Adhyatma is a science of all sciences! The sooner they are freed from their illusory theorems embellished with figurative verbiage, the better for all persons, society, nation or even the world at large! Reasonism has no alternative. May reason triumph!
Lastly I will conclude the article by quoting a very sensible statement made by novelist Zola:
Civilisation will progress only when the last brick of the last church falls on the last priest.

Y J Mahabal

Y J Mahabal writes about himself: "Readers may ask at the outset as to why I do call myself a layman. Well I actually am one, a retired clerk of a railway office at Bhusawal. However owing to my flair for reading, writing and discussions with persons of almost all shades of opinions - spiritualism and rationalism not excluded - right from the nineteenth year of my age, I became a writer (not very famous though) whose articles in Marathi, English and a few ones in Hindi and Sanskrit too, furthering the cause of rationalism, secularism, scientific spirit were published in prominent periodicals. Of my Marathi articles, two books, one humorous and the other thought-provoking, named Manthan (Churning)."